

SHRISTI SPECIAL ACADEMY

Genesis

Shristi was born of a passion for children with special needs felt by three special educators, Meena Jain, Sharon Watts and Suchita Somashekariah in Bangalore, India.

Individuals with special needs are variously known as the Mentally Challenged, Mentally Handicapped and Intellectually Impaired. Shristi's founders saw them as the "differently abled" and were determined to give a fuller life to the extent possible to those who had been written off.

The Mentally Challenged comprise three percent of the population. However, as intellectual impairment is an invisible handicap, it is generally not recognized and little is known about it. Awareness about their abilities and services to improve their quality of life are inadequate. The divide is even more pronounced in the rural areas.

Shristi broke away from the traditional framework and provided a wider range of services from infancy to adulthood doing away with the barriers of having children who have not achieved toilet training, below the age of 5. In addition, Shristi started a Sheltered Workshop for employing persons with Mental Retardation who cannot take open employment for various reasons.

Beginning with four children and three special educators at the time of establishment, Shristi sought to be an organization, which was a friend to the Mentally Challenged AND their families.

Shristi has grown, in nine years, to one hundred and two children of all ages from infancy to adulthood. For the very intensive programs required, It has forty-six staff including therapists, instructors and support staff.

The values underlying Shristi's programs are: unconditional acceptance and giving, positivism and an unwavering belief that there can be improvement in every mentally challenged individual, no matter how severe the extent of retardation or how long the time required.

Facilities and Programs

Shristi aims to bring about a change in the attitude towards the Mentally Challenged and the way they were viewed. Hence, programs are designed so that they support the Mentally Challenged and Autistic of different ages.

Shristi's facility is located in Basaveswarnagar in North-West Bangalore where such services are few. In the year 2002, a rural facility was started at Channenahalli village, off Magadi Road, Bangalore, where on 2 acres of land donated by a well wisher, the programs for Autism and ADHD, the Vocational Habilitation Centre, the Respite Care Centre for the profoundly retarded and the Balwadi are functioned.

At present, Shristi reaches out to 103 Mentally Challenged and Autistic individuals, of all ages from infancy to adulthood at its two facilities. The Balwadi, "Chiguru" has 15 normal children enrolled at present.

All of Shristi's programs are unique and scientifically designed. They are functioned to provide a continuum of services from infancy to adulthood, all leading to independence and self reliance. This focus guides the programs at all times and so every effort is made to

enable the child / individual to be integrated with normal society – whether school or employment.

Shristi is among the few institutions which offer a full time Centre Based Early Intervention Program for infants and young children (0 to 5 years) which, by starting early, aim at enabling adaptation of children in normal setups - at school and in society. The program has resulted in 26 children joining mainstream schools in the past 5 years.

Shristi is one of the very few organizations which has a program for the profoundly retarded (IQ<20) who are considered untrainable and often chained in institutions due to their aggressive and self injurious behavior. We have 12 children in this program, mostly from the rural areas around our campus, and have enabled improvement in every single individual there, through intensive therapy aimed at teaching them self-care skills, basic communication and domestic skills.

At the Vocational Habilitation Centre, 50 Mentally Challenged individuals are taught skills such as Tailoring; Screen Printing; Manufacture of various articles including Paper Products and Candles as also cleaning and Disinfectant agents aimed at enabling economic empowerment.

The products which include a range of Jute and cloth products; paper bags, envelopes etc. assorted candles, decorated diyas with wax etc., are sold at Sales at various Corporate Organizations and the income generated used to support the nominal stipend paid to those in the Vocational Production Unit and is thus a major step in enabling economic independence and dignity for them.

In 2004, "Chiguru", a Balwadi was started at Channenahalli to provide preschool education and skills to children under five from the villages around the rural campus with the aim of providing them stimulus; to identify developmental delays and provide early intervention services as also to provide inclusive education to normal and developmentally delayed children. The Balwadi has 15 children enrolled, currently.

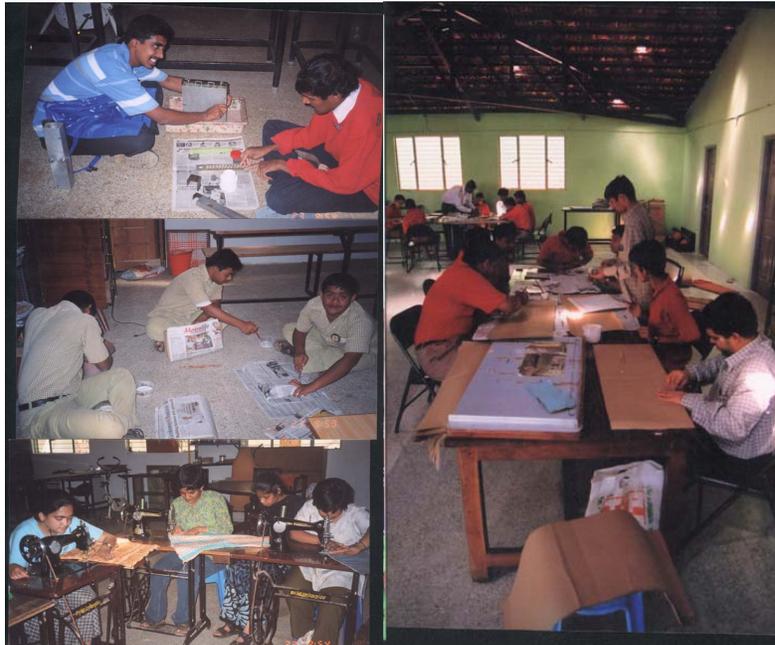
Shristi's programs are child and family centered and scientifically designed, encompassing all areas of development. They are multi therapeutic and holistic including special education, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy , family therapy and others like music, sports, recreation ,horticulture , pet therapy and counseling . As most (over 50%) of the children are from very poor homes and from the rural areas, children also get food and medical support.

This, coupled with loving care, unconditional acceptance and positivism and a high degree of awareness of each child's needs and consistent follow up of their progress at home, has resulted in enabling all the children to become more independent and skilled and thus, has given them more dignity and acceptance in their families and society.

It is not surprising that all the programs have impacted not only the children, but also their families, having resulted in families who are more functional and empowered.

Future Plans

- Shristi's future plans include: Expansion of our services at Channenahalli to provide Early Intervention and Stimulation services, Residential Care facilities and a Research and Training Institute in addition to its specialised program for Autism and ADHD, Respite care and the Vocational, Pre-vocational Training unit and Sheltered Workshop.
- Upgrade equipment / machinery and furniture in the units to enhance and better the quality of services .
- As there is a dearth for manpower in this field , Shristi intends to start Teacher Training programmes at all levels - rural /semi-urban/urban in the next three years.
- Increase awareness through workshops at all levels, seminars, advocacy campaigns about Autism and Mental Retardation, prevention, Early Intervention and Training , habilitation and employment opportunities for adults with challenges.



How you can Support Shruti's Children

You may provide financial support as you choose or may elect to sponsor in one of the following ways: Pay for the Medical Costs of the 125 children	US\$ 250/ month
Pay for the Intervention Program of a child for one year	US\$ 400/year
Sponsor a child completely for one year(Details below)	US\$ 800/ year
Pay for the Nutrition Program for 125 children	US\$ 1400/ month
Pay for the Transportation Costs of 125 children	US\$1800/month
Pay for the salaries of 15 Therapists for a month	US\$ 2800/month

A Child's Intervention Program includes...

Habilitation services	Therapeutic Intervention, Multi-Sensory Stimulation, Language Stimulation, Family Counseling, psychotherapy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Experiential Cognitive Learning
Resource materials	Teaching aids & Equipment, Stationery-paints/ crayons/ toys/ games/ story books/activity books/ log books, recording sheets, Audio-visual aids etc.,
Transport facility	Transport facility provided to pick and drop children from their home, Outings-field trips and Sales
Medical facility	Medicines, Medical screening/ investigations, Any other specialist treatment etc.,
Nutritional supplement	Breakfast, Lunch, milk, fruits/ snack, juice, other complementary nutritional supplement.

Stained Glass Ceiling



Bopanna is a handsome 14year old young man with the most charming smile. When you meet him, he will extend his hand to say “hello, how are you?” and reply to your questions with panache. Bopanna was diagnosed as having Autism Spectrum Disorder and enrolled at Shristi in 1997, with severe challenging behaviors – extremely limited sitting tolerance and non-compliance of almost all instructions. He was highly destructive and any toy / pencil/ flash card /paper/ book that he was given would be destroyed. Bopanna belongs to Coorg, Karnataka and his mother relocated to Bangalore for his therapeutic intervention.

His communication was so limited that even his mother could not comprehend him. Bopanna also indulged in irrelevant laughter, aggressive behavior with younger children such as grabbing toys from other children, pouring leftover juice into the computer monitor and destructive behaviour for which he needed to be watched all the time and many odd behaviours.

Shristi designed and commenced an intervention program where priority was given to improve Bopanna’s sitting tolerance, increasing compliance of instructions, reducing his destructive behavior and enhancing his limited communication and comprehension gradually through experiential learning and exercises in structured communication. It was discovered that Bopanna is a highly skilled artist - the therapy enabled this talent to blossom and his talent was also used to modify his behavior. He was encouraged to go for classes to the Chitrakala Parishad, where his skills were honed further.

Today Bopanna can speak three languages: English, Kannada and Coorgi. His artistic skills have flowered and he creates the most exquisite stained glass paintings. Bopanna rarely indulges in destructive behavior and is comfortable in social gatherings and situations. He initiates conversations and even walks up on stage to sing, act and perform without any anxiety. He can plan the use of his time productively and helps his mother in domestic chores.

At the end of this academic session in 2005, Bopanna’s mother plans to return to Coorg. She is confident that they can now enjoy their family life, without therapy and allow him to pursue his passion for painting and future as an artist.

Salaam Zindagi



The silent 14-year-old boy, dressed in his yellow and green checked uniform, little bag in hand and so eager to go to school is Mohsin. When you meet him, he will always greet you with a salaam. How proud and happy he is that he goes to school just like his brother's and sisters and that too by a big yellow bus! In fact, Mohsin loves school so much that he sulks during vacation time thinking he is being punished.

Years ago, when Mohsin had seizures and his family learnt that he was severely Mentally Retarded (IQ < 20) and had Cerebral Palsy, all their dreams of him growing up and helping their poor family become economically independent, suddenly died.

Very few institutions work with the Severely and Profoundly Retarded – they are considered “untrainable” and often chained due to their aggressive and sometimes violent behavior caused by their inability to communicate. It can take from 6 months to several years for a skill (such as eating or toileting or dressing) to be learned.

Mohsin's family is totally dependent on his old maternal grandfather, a cardiac patient and lives in great hardship. As he grew, Mohsin learnt to walk but continued to be dependent even for eating and bathing. Frequent seizures and cerebral palsy were a major deterrent in his improvement.

Mohsin came to Shristi in 1996 and received love, empathy, patience and an intense individualized rehabilitation program, which included medical consultation and medicines; nutrition, physiotherapy, communication enhancement and sensory integration. His seizures were controlled by anti epileptic medication, which was started on doctor's advice. He was also started on therapy to reduce drooling, which interfered with his chewing. As Mohsin does not speak, he was also given training to improve his communication and comprehension so that he could make his basic needs known to others.

As Mohsin's seizures reduced due to the medication, he was put on a full-day intervention program. The changes began slowly but very surely. Today Mohsin is a very different young man – he communicates through gestures, feeds himself dry food and fruit and is almost independent in toileting. He even takes initiative to make his bed; pick up his belongings to come to school; helps his mother in simple domestic chores like putting away dirty dishes; picking clothes to and from washing etc. He even understands how others feel, and effectively communicates his wants. Mohsin even corrects his younger siblings, using gestures, when they do not behave well!

Recently, Mohsin's family relocated to another part of Bangalore and he has had to discontinue his program here. Mohsin's mother reports that despite this, he continues his activities well, just as he was trained at Shristi.

The Eternal Diva



A four year old took her first steps and walked into loving arms. Bright eyes shining, her face creased into a smile - it seemed almost unimaginable that till the age of two, Deepthi couldn't even sit independently, let alone stand or walk.

Deepthi was born with a condition known as "Hyper-Ammonia Syndrome", a disorder in which the body does not metabolize protein. Hence, when she was brought to Shristi at the age of 2 years and 3 months, her diet consisted of only milk. At that time, Deepthi's developmental age was that of a 6-month-old baby. She had no head-neck control; could not track sounds visually or localize them.

Amidst much protest from her, on her 3rd day at Shristi, Deepthi was started on a low protein, enriched diet. Her previously monotonous diet of milk was changed to a balanced one of rice and boiled vegetables, soups, and fruits, given in small quantities till her digestive system adapted.

Simultaneously, she was provided therapeutic intervention for overall growth, which included sensory stimulation, physiotherapy, speech therapy and activities for improving cognition.

Within 6 months of the special diet, Deepthi was sitting independently. From a passive, weak and quiet child, she became a curious and active 3-year-old. She began playing and tinkering with toys and making sounds. She improved remarkably in all areas of development and gradually the gap between her milestones and that of normal development reduced.

Within 2 years of the nutrition program, Deepthi began walking independently and eating dry foods. Her abilities enhanced remarkably leading to acquisition of skills in all areas.

Today Deepthi, an active and alert 7-year-old, is part of the Primary Group at Shristi where she is exposed to a primary school curriculum. She loves solving puzzles and playing with her friends. Like any other seven year old, she loves being the centre of attraction in her class and takes a leading role in participating and initiating activities in her peer group.

Deepthi's story clearly shows what a vital role is played by good nutrition in healthy growth and development. This is even more pronounced in the case of children with developmental delays. As simple a factor as a balanced and wholesome diet can result in a complete reversal of debilitating conditions and the possibility of a near normal life for a child and the family.

Angel's Dance



The fair, soft -featured child with big eyes, dancing so gracefully, an angel mistakenly on earth, is little Dinal. Dinal, like other 9-year-olds, goes to school, does yoga and is a swimming champion. Yet Dinal was born with Downs Syndrome, a chromosomal abnormality that results in many physical problems and delayed growth. When she came to Shristi at 1 year 9 months, Dinal was a floppy little baby who seemed to have no muscle. She couldn't sit, stand, crawl or walk. She fell ill often, was passive and would not respond to or interact with people.

A structured and intensive program for her rehabilitation was designed for Dinal at school and home. This included special education, sensory stimulation for stimulating her senses, physiotherapy and movement therapy, language stimulation, medical screening and nutrition. It aimed at teaching her self-care and personal grooming; social skills and communication, pre-academic skills and motor skills. She was given exposure to all normal activities including shopping and entertainment and interaction with normal peers in a playgroup.

Today, Dinal at the age of 9, after 5 years of intervention is like any normal child. She can take care of herself independently. She swims, cycles, dances and does yoga.

She is friendly, sociable and highly aware. Dinal attends regular school (since 2 years), where she is rated academically bright and is a rank holder.

She dances and performs on stage confidently. She has won several prizes at swimming competitions including the Gold Medal at the Para Abilympics in Mumbai in October 2004.

The right intervention program at the right time – this is what Dinal got and with it also an opportunity to live a normal and full life. The many deficits she was born with were overcome and today she is on the road to a life of success and achievement.

Journeying to a Better Life



Bittoo is a profoundly retarded (IQ <20) 20-year-old young man with Cerebral Palsy. The verdict in such cases is “untrainable” and “dependent for life”. In fact, the profoundly retarded are often chained in institutions due to their self-injurious behavior.

Characteristically, Bittoo was completely dependent for eating and toileting could not communicate except making guttural sounds, was given to aggressive behavior such as kicking, hitting, head butting and self injurious behavior such as biting and banging his head.

For many years he was sent to a special school where he was fed and cared for but had limited interaction and minimal training.

He was enrolled in Shristi’s Respite Care Centre, where he was started on a structured program including self care skills and behavior shaping.

After 1½ years, Bittoo, who was considered untrainable, is a new person. He feeds himself and is almost completely independent in toileting. He communicates by gestures and enjoys music. Bittoo has learnt to perform errands, make arrangements for lunch, mop the floor, sort vegetables and keep them in the refrigerator. His aggressive behavior has reduced to a very large extent. From being completely dependent, he is now an active contributor at school and home. Recently, Bittoo’s parents were away for a month. For the first time in his life, Bittoo lived away from his parents, with his grandparents. His mother reports that on her return there was not a single report about any problems including aggressive behavior.

For the profoundly retarded with severe intellectual impairment, learning these basic and “ordinary” skills are major milestones. Yet, training can enable even the most challenged to become productive individuals, offering them a better quality of life, dignity and respite for their families.