

Bank execs turn flat into dharamshala

Each of them contributes around Rs 10-15,000 every month to fund education of nearly 70 poor kids in a west Delhi colony

Neha Pushkarna | TNN

Twelve-year-old Himanshi would have never known how it feels to study with peers in a school. Though she spent most of her time sitting at home due to lack of financial support, Himanshi can now read and write. She even speaks a few good words in English and loves to draw. A little time and the genuine will of 20 employees of Deutsche Bank in the city was all it took to change her life. And a two-room flat in Ranjit Nagar in west Delhi has been witness to this change.

This group of bank professionals contributes Rs 10,000-15,000 every month from their own pockets to fund the education of nearly 70 underprivileged children. Some of the kids earlier studied in a temple courtesy an NGO, Swashrit. But kirtans, aartis and community functions often hampered their study routine. The bank employees then rented a flat near Patel Nagar, hired teachers, provided them with stationery to form a dedicated school of sorts — which now the children refer to as their 'dharamshala'.

With the backing of these bankers, the NGO has now started



Photos: Yogesh Kumar

ALL FOR A CAUSE: With the backing of the bank executives, NGO Swashrit has now started teaching these children in shifts. The kids earlier used to study in a temple where they had a hard time concentrating

teaching children in two shifts. Some of them have even been integrated in regular schools. "These children used to study in a temple earlier. But when the NGO approached the bank about one-and-a-half years ago seeking support for the children, we decided to help out. We contribute around Rs 1,500 each quarter to fund their education," said Ankush Choud-



hary, area head of bank. Every fortnight, the employees visit the flat-school on rotation basis to bond with the children and help groom them. Many times, these interactive sessions also turn into picnics and activity camps. "They ask us about a whole lot of things like how can one become a banker or which car do we drive. We asked them the other day if

they would burst crackers on Diwali and they said it was a bad idea as it caused pollution. They are now literate as well as more aware and sensitive," Choudhry said.

Many of these children had never gone to a school as they worked with their parents to augment family income or because they just could not afford it. The bankers then roped in three professional teachers to help in their studies and also discipline them. Sneha Lata, a teacher

at a government school, said, "The number of children coming to us have definitely increased as they get all facilities here. We have got many children admitted in schools and also prepare them for exams though convincing their parents is a task. We have to keep motivating them."

Bhawna Barmi, general secretary of Swashrit Society and a clinical psychologist, added that after the bankers joined them with funds and offered to give time to the children every weekend, the whole process of educating these kids became more organised. "These professionals not only met all needs of the children, they also helped train the teachers with their expertise and communication skills. The children now have access to education and guidance, which was necessary to make sure they do not slip," Barmi said.

For the employees, however,

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the experience of making life better for these children has been more than just philanthropic. Japjit Singh Bedi, the bank head for north and east, said, "The experience has been really moving for us. We were a little apprehensive initially but now we are confident that we can help in many such projects in the city. We can do a lot more."

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