

Sprout Alumni Impact Story

Initiate, Inspire, Involve.

Children Behind Us: A Literacy Project by Shobana Nair



Shobana Nair, a 19 year old student at the Multimedia University in Malaysia, noticed a startling trend amongst children across South-East Asia. A large percentage of children- particularly urban slum dwellers have a very limited access to education due to rising education costs. This problem ultimately has a large impact on literacy rates, health issues and contributes to poor living conditions. Shobana joined the Sprout e-course in June 2009 in order to change the state education in some of these slums. Illiteracy is a common problem facing children in low income areas around the world. Children living in these slums are deprived of a formal education and are left without the necessary skills to improve their living conditions.

Shobana has recognized the need for literacy development and has helped develop a project to reach children affected by poverty in two different countries. The project was named 'Children Behind Us' and aimed to provide a useful education at no cost. Shobana and her team focused their efforts first in Jakarta, Indonesia to reach the great need of children affected by the ever widening income gap. After partnering with the British International School, Children Behind Us was able to build a "sekolah pondok" which is a hut type of school to establish their learning centre. Drawing on information from their partners and dedicated volunteers, we have been teaching math, English, Indonesian language and arts. Shobana explains that, "Our goal is to provide them with basic literacy and numeracy skills such as reading, writing and counting which will enable them to find a place in society and lift themselves out of poverty". Currently in the fifth month of the project, Shobana has noticed that "in Indonesia, it has created a thirst for education among the urban slum kids. They now look forward to learning unlike before".

Children behind us next turned to Malaysia. Shobana feels that "due to the fact that we (Malaysia) are quite developed and don't have many urban slums, we shifted our sights to refugee children instead. Because refugee children are not allowed to attend schools here in Malaysia, we decided that they would benefit most from the project". Refugees in this area have already established community based schools so here, Children Behind Us work as a 'middle man' to provide supplies and volunteers to teach arts and crafts. The team has even been able to provide one of these schools with a computer to help educate children using current information technology. Shobana also reaches out to the local community to help raise awareness about the current state of refugees in Malaysia. In the two months that the program has been available in Malaysia, the refugees and locals have a better understanding of each other and the stigma previously associated with refugees has been drastically reduced. Shobana has also noticed "a change in attitude among the children and they now are eager to learn".

Since the results of the project have been quite positive in two countries, Shobana feels that in the future, this idea could be replicated worldwide with the development of material that tailored towards specific communities.



Children Behind Us: An Interview with Shobana Nair

Illiteracy is one of the more preventable dilemmas associated with poverty-stricken areas. Children in the urban slums of South-East Asia are struggling to receive even the most basic of educations due to a widening income gap. Shobana Nair has recognized the great need to provide children in these areas with literacy and numeracy skills to help improve their chances of lifting themselves out of poverty. In June 2009, Shobana joined the Sprout e-course to implement a project idea aimed at educating children in both Indonesia and Malaysia. Recently, we spoke with Shobana about her project and experience with the Sprout course.

Can you tell us a little bit about your Sprout project idea?

The main idea of the project is to help bring basic literacy skills to children in urban slum areas. The pilot project took off according to the project submitted for sprout. Everything went according to plan, and we have been impacting the community in Indonesia. In Malaysia however, due to the fact that we are quite developed and don't have many urban slums, we shifted our sights to refugee children instead. Refugees have set up their own community-based schools in shop lots and have volunteers from within the community to help teach the kids. So in Malaysia, we have become the middle man between the refugee community and the locals and we are helping create awareness on the state of refugees.

What evaluation tools does your project use to collect data?

We have mini tests to see how much students have learned with us. Any improvement in their performance is seen as a positive impact.

Based on the outcome of your initial Sprout project implementation, how are you planning to make your project sustainable for the long run?

The project is already running in two countries. Our aim is to expand it to other countries within this region and to start a global movement. We need to get more people in other places who are willing to take up the project. They should follow the same steps to ensure that the project runs smoothly. We will continue to support any project that sprouts from us.

Does your Sprout project have replication and scalability potential?

Since the project has been relatively successful in 2 countries, it can be emulated by others because education is a sector that impacts everyone regardless of location. What is unique is that anyone can just use the basic idea and tailor it to suit the community they want to impact.

How has the Sprout e-course impacted the course of the project?

The Sprout E-course has given us the direction that we needed. Before Sprout, the idea was there, but it was not organized. It was only after Sprout that we had a clear direction of how things need to be done to make sure that we are doing things right.

For more information on this project, visit: <http://projects.tigweb.org/cbu/about/>

Children Behind Us

Meet Shobana Nair – a 19 year old student from Malaysia. Shobana joined the Sprout e-course to address low literacy rates in South-East Asia due to a wide income gap. Many children and refugees in poor areas of both Malaysia and Indonesia are unable to afford a formal education which has led to high illiteracy rates in certain regions. After establishing a team, Shobana and her partners developed a hut in Indonesia to deliver educational materials relating to reading, math and arts. In Malaysia, Shobana works diligently to create awareness of the current refugee situation and support their educational development through fundraising. Through the experience at Sprout, Shobana has increased the capacity for children from lower income families to develop an education that could help lift them out of poverty.

