

Utkarsha Project

Our entire world is a nest that accommodates all living beings, however some of us are more fortunate than others - and have the capacity to make a difference. "Earn daily and then only you can eat daily" is the living motto for the people of the Sahariya tribe living in close proximity to the city of Gwalior - but can we really blame them for their short term vision?

A local tribe, their main livelihood is supported by wood cutting and collection of minor forest products. Lacking any infrastructure they are then forced to sell them at throw away prices to the local shopkeepers. Some of them are involved in other jobs that require minimal skills. The average annual income may not exceed US\$120 per family. The root cause of the poverty for these people is illiteracy amongst the tribal people - caught in a hopeless situation of having to fend for themselves on a daily basis with no hope for doing anything to make themselves part of a different future. An average tribal never gets three square meals a day. Scarcity of resources - whether it is in form of food, clothing or shelter is something they live with every day. A child is seen as a spare pair of hands to earn some more on an immediate basis versus the luxury of being sent for education (a costly affair also) to change the course of life.



Due to the hard work and efforts of some volunteers of Vivekananda Kendra, Gwalior a barren hilly rock has been transformed with green vegetation and the environment made lively with chirping birds and flowing streams. It is reminiscent of the atmosphere that must have prevailed in ancient ashrams or gurukuls (places where the sages taught their disciples). With this background "Utkarsha" (means awakening) was established on October 28, 1992 as a free hostel (boarding place) for tribal children based on the age old gurukul system of education.

During the course of their work efforts workers from Vivekananda Kendra, they realized that in order to make a difference to the future of the tribal folks it was extremely important to start working with the next generation. The Kendra workers took it upon themselves to work with the tribal folks to convince them of the value of education for their children. The going was not easy, as they tried to convince the tribal folks on the importance of education, versus having an extra pair of hands. It started as a small project and since then has matured into a full-fledged initiative, with tribal folks having children on the waiting list.



Utkarsha's principle is very simple - one child per family is allowed to stay at the campus. He or she is admitted to a local school in the city and lives amongst other students under the supervision and guidance of the warden. The children are provided a holistic experience in life - education supported by craft skills, prayers, yoga, and community work. After a decade the experience with the children has been wonderful, the children have undergone multidimensional personality development in the following levels –

- 1) Physical level - Yoga, games, exercise.
- 2) Mental level - Stories, songs, various competitions.
- 3) Intellectual level - outing and excursions, various games.
- 4) Psychological level - song, meditation,
- 5) Spiritual level - Gita Path, prayers, recitations etc.

Throughout these many years the children have developed group dynamics, a rhythm, and a lifestyle that they never expected as below:

- 1) Daily schedule "early to rise and early to bed".
- 2) Washing own utensils, clothes and keeping the premises clean.
- 3) Healthy & hygienic lifestyle, something that is next to impossible for them in their villages.
- 4) Prayers twice a day in prayer hall and before every meal.
- 5) Exercise and yoga practices everyday.
- 6) Communication skills and participatory life style. Sharing with equal proportion.

In 1993 the concept started by supporting 8 boys and 2 girls, from various districts and villages. In 1995 as Vivekananda Needam was fully constructed Utkarsha was shifted in the campus. Today Utkarsha is getting prepared for future expansion. The concept has proven its worth and besides accommodating more number of children (27) the children under this project are getting ready to enter life in the information age. Today they stay in four main areas in the Needam complex:

- Kartavya (Two room cottage) - 6 children
- Samidha (Three room cottage) - 2 girls
- Satsang (double room cottage) - 2 boys
- Aruni and Shwetketu (Dormitory)- 15 boys

The Needam complex also has cottages for old age residents as well as a Nature Cure center. The children live in an atmosphere of harmony with the environment, other older age residents, visiting nature cure enthusiasts, as well as temporary local camp visitors.

All of the students were given "Vivek" as the last name after Swami Vivekananda, they never had a family name before in their tribe. Three of the students do not have parents any more and they have been adopted by Needam to provide them a home.

Pratik Vivek is from the very first batch of students and now studies in an ITI (industrial Technical Institute) learning work-skills related to electrical work. He is in charge of all types of electric fittings and maintenance, the diesel generator and other appliances in the Campus.

"Let her arise out of the peasant's cottage, grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fishermen, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter seller. Let her emanate from the factory from marts and markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains."

Swami Vivekananda on Mother India

How can you help?

You can be the difference for a child to spend his life in child labor or a life with a promise for a better tomorrow and all future generations. Supporting each child takes \$325 per year that translates to 0.90 cents per day, the cost of a coke bottle in the vending machine. For a distribution of costs that you will be supporting please see below.

Pays for one student/year	US\$ 325
\$100 pays for food	
\$100 pays for tuition/conveyance	
\$75 pays for school bags/stationary/books/supplies	
\$50 pays for clothes/uniform/footwear	

A typical day of the children in the hostel –

Serial number	Time	Activity	Remarks or significance
1	5.00 A.M. 5.30 in winter	Wake up and ablutions	
2	5.45 A.M.	Morning prayers	Includes Pratah Smaran composed by Srimat Adi Sankaracharya and a collection of Bhagwat Geeta verses based on Karma yoga. Followed by a meditation.
3	6.15 A.M.	Yoga practice	For all-round personality development which includes physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth yoga provides basis for them.
4	7.15 A.M.	School for seniors and for rest of the students cleanliness activity.	Daily at least an hour or even some times more than once children work together to learn and practice self help and self reliance.
5	8.30 A.M.	Break fast	Menu includes satwik foods like- Poha, Upama, Daliya, occasionally Idli or Dosa sometimes as per budget permits sweets etc.
6	9.00 A.M.	Self study or tuition class as per necessary.	Academic development has no any other alternative. Over all Utkarsha every year passing rate is 65 %.
7	11.00 A.M.	Schooling for juniors	11.00 to 5.00 P.M.
8	1.30 P.M.	Lunch	generally morning shift scholars come back from schools by 1.00 P.M.
9	2.00 P.M.	Rest	
10	3.30 P.M.	Light refreshments.	
11	4.00 P.M.	Study classes	
12	5.30 p.m.	Games	Out door games like cricket or of their choice as seniors too join some times.
13	6.30 P.M.	Devotional sessions	Bhajan sandhya includes daily chanting and singing some Bhajans followed by meditation for a while.
14	7.15 P.M.	Dinner	
15	8.00 P.M.	Home work, getting prepared for next day school	
16	8.45 P.M.	Story telling or night assembly in which children enact or sing of their own choice.	Besides some TV serials for kids like Shaktiman, Mahabharat, cricket matches monthly once or twice any movie suitable for kids are shown. Frequent outing for circus after exams etc.

List of current children including their ages and classes

No.	Name	Age	Class	School	Village
1	Pratik Vivek	17 yrs	1 st yr	Industrial Training Institute	Gokulpura Distt Gwalior
2	Balwant Vivek	15 yrs	9 th	Radiant High School	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
3	Ashish Vivek	14 yrs	8 th	Radiant High School	Pipalkheddi Distt Shivpuri
4	Kamalkishore Vivek	15 yrs	8 th	Privately	Dohara Distt Morena
5	Dinesh Vivek	9 yrs	3 rd	Sharada Vidya Mandir (Tapovan)	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
6	Sunil Vivek	9 yrs	3 rd	Sharada Vidya Mandir (Tapovan)	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
7	Shiv Singh Vivek	6 yrs	2 nd	Sharada Vidya Mandir (Tapovan)	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
8	Ramlal Vivek	9 yrs	3 rd	Sharada Vidya Mandir (Tapovan)	Patrota Distt Gwalior
9	Deshraj Vivek	9 yrs	4 th	Sharada Vidya Mandir (Tapovan)	Patrota Distt Gwalior
10	Sameer Vivek	7 yrs	1 st	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Kareshia
11	Manoj Vivek	7 yrs	1 st	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Kareshia
12	Amarsingh Vivek	7 yrs	1 st	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
13	Neeraj Vivek	7 yrs	U.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
14	Rakesh Vivek	6 yrs	U.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
15	Hemraj Vivek	6 yrs	U.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
16	Dheeraj Vivek	6 yrs	U.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Needam Gwalior
17	Banti Vivek	5 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Khodan Distt Gwalior
18	Neetu Vivek	6 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Tinkala Distt Gwalior
19	Kuber Vivek	5 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
20	Harikishore Vivek	6 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
21	Komal Vivek	5 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Hajeera Distt Gwalior
22	Ajay Vivek	5 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
23	Dilip Vivek	5 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Pipalkheddi Distt Shivpuri
24	Pavan Vivek	4 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior
25	Maitreyee Vivek	13 yrs	7 th	Radiant Vidya Mandir	Needam Gwalior
26	Mukta Vivek	9 yrs	3 rd	Gwalior Glory High school	Needam Gwalior
27	Lokesh Vivek	6 yrs	L.K.G.	Gangaram Vidya Mandir	Ghatigaon Distt Gwalior.