



EMPOWERING LIVES

KARNATAKA-BASED NGO, MAYA, WORKING SINCE 1991 IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL REFORM, HAS DEVELOPED THREE PROJECTS INTO SUCCESSFUL INDEPENDENT ENTITIES IMPACTING MILLIONS OF LIVES. BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

American cultural anthropologist of the 1950s and 1960s, Margaret Mead, once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” If you need proof, look no further than Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness (MAYA), a Karnataka-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) which has been tirelessly working towards social reform for the past quarter of a century.

Established on January 19, 1991, under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, 1960, MAYA started



Top: A health navigator providing village with BP and diabetes services. Bottom: A school health and hygiene workshop in Chanapatna

INITIATING CHANGE

Soon after it was instituted, MAYA took up the cause of children. “We began by working closely with street children nearly two decades ago, where we campaigned against child labour and pioneered in the space of child rights’ advocacy, policy and training at the grass roots level. In our attempt to get children off the street, we realised that education was crucial and we evolved into community mobilisations and ownerships of local stakeholders of schools to reform the education system from inside. This is now known as ‘Prajayatna’ or ‘Citizens’ Initiative for Educational Reform,’” informs Alex.

The next issue that MAYA tackled was children dropping out of school owing to lack of employment opportunities after schooling. The movement introduced bridge schools and prevocational and vocational training centres for the youth to help them get into mainstream jobs. This has now evolved into “LabourNet”.

A third initiative MAYA undertook

was to support the local artisans of Channapatna in Karnataka by reviving the old, dying art of lac toy making. Today, the unit is known as “MAYA Organic” and caters to a large domestic and international market through its unique, organic, handmade toys and accessories.

25 YEARS LATER

Post incubation with MAYA, “Prajayatna” is today an independent programme. It works with marginalised children aged three to 14 years by making their schools and

out by taking up systemic issues such as education and livelihood that needed urgent attention. Today, three of its programmes have been successfully developed into independent social enterprises that have substantial on-ground impact. Alex Rodrigues, CEO, MAYA,

explains: “We began our journey by driving change in the systemic issues of education and livelihood.

Of our programmes, three have become independent organisations. They are known as Prajayatna, MAYA Organic and LabourNet. All three of them have had a substantial impact on the ground.”

MAYA’s mission, in his words, is: “Working to create an empowered and equitable society that systematically addresses livelihood, education and health.”

MAYA: A CASE STUDY

The story of Alok Pandey from Raebareli is an inspiring one. Pursuing graduation, this youngster lives with his family of four and his father was the only earning member of the family. Alok was keen to help his father to support his family. He saw a newspaper ad on the LabourNet training programme and was trained in domestic electrical wiring. He now works as a part time electrician and makes about Rs 3000 per month.

anganwadis deliver quality services so as to give them an equitable opportunity to improve their lives. The programme, in collaboration with concerned stakeholders such as parents, teachers, the bureaucracy, and elected representatives, works towards creating an ecosystem that enables these children to learn well and reach their potential. The programme is present in over 7,000 schools and 1,000 anganwadis that reach out to 500,000 children in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana.

Today, LabourNet is an independent, for-profit, social enterprise, aspiring to train over 500,000 individuals and approaches its core purpose of developing skills and enabling livelihoods as a social challenge where aspirations, opportunities and inadequacies need to be brought together through a well-synchronised ecosystem. A NSDC partner with presence in over 28 states of the country, LabourNet has trained over 100,000 workers till date.

Maya Organic today provides employment to more than 200 people. By purchasing Maya Organic products, marketed under the brand name, MO, you can support the livelihoods of lac artisans in Channapatna. Significantly, the project has ensured survival of traditional lac-based art in a rapidly-changing global economy. Over 85 per cent of these products are exported to the US, Japan and other countries.

While primary funding came from institutional and corporate contributions, in recent years, MAYA has been getting a great response from individual donors and other forms of online contribution such as crowd-funding platforms. Urging more people to support the NGO, Rashmi Hegde, Social Development Head, MAYA, says, "Your support will go towards the MAYA Health programme, to ensure



Health education being imparted at the doorsteps of registered clients

children stay in school, people don't lose jobs, government-driven health centres become more accountable and overall health of the community improves." Over the next three years, MAYA is looking to scale up and further develop its products and services and form social enterprises. In Phase III starting 2019, it is looking to consolidate social enterprises and work in unlimited geographies with several partners.



HEALTH IS WEALTH

MAYA is busy driving a fourth initiative named MAYA Health that focuses on promoting preventive healthcare among the urban and rural poor. Rashmi Hegde, Social Development Head, MAYA, informs: "Our past learning has taught us that health is a critical parameter in an individual's life. This is to say we have realised that no matter how much we educate a child in school or send people back to work, all is lost when a person falls ill and gets into a debt trap." MAYA Health's vision is to inspire health in communities, where every individual and household starts taking ownership of health. The way MAYA Health works is by empowering local women as micro-entrepreneurs to form a network of caregivers delivering affordable, preventive health services door-to-door. Presently, the programme has over 30 micro-entrepreneurs known as "Health Navigators" who work closely with the government and other players in the healthcare ecosystem. The good news is that these "Health Navigators" have already been able to reach more than 38,000 community members of Chanapatna. There are also over 5,066 people who have started work in areas such as diabetes, hypertension, child nutrition, eye care management, and menstrual health and hygiene. "We envision that support communities move from a reactive mind-set to a proactive one towards health. We are creating a new channel of healthcare micro-entrepreneurs who are based in the local community and will help with awareness about and detection of diseases and timely intervention," adds Hegde.