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EDUCATION TALKS: Nardeo Singh, Edward Surujballi, Jay Sobhraj and Wilson Montero



JAY SOBHRAJ, SENIOR VP, ZARA REALTY



Mr. Edward Surujballi and students



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“WE began with our modest Zara Computer Training Centre. Then a few preparatory classes were conducted and immediately we saw the need for an expansion. So the Swami Vidyanandaji Learning Centre was built and fully furnished. Again the response was so overwhelming. Additional was prepared for more classes in another section of the building. Today, or rather on every Saturday, the America Sevashram Sangha, is transformed into an educational institution with computer, mathematics and English classes for both adults and children,” said Jay Sobhraj, the Senior Vice-President of Zara Realty Holding Corp.

“In the past few years, many enrolled and utilized these very, very low cost classes with exceptionally experienced, certified and talented tutors. The most exciting part is, these children are so disciplined and hard working that we are seeing results, whereby they are getting into some of the most distinguished colleges and high schools in the US. It’s a great all round effort from the teachers, students, parents,” adds Jay. “And soon, with this kind of interest and cooperation continuing, we might be able to build the first, full-fledged Hindu College for our community,” the Vice-President of Zara confidently declared.

The Hindu College, as referred to by Jay Sobhraj, is an institution under the umbrella of the ashram, that is synonymous with influencing and changing the once-limited lives of presidents, ministers, doctors, scientists, engineers, writers, etc. This model institution is the Hindu College at Cove and John, East Coast Demerara, Guyana.

For decades since its opening in 1956 the Guyana Sevashram Sangha, became known popularly as the Cove and John Ashram and a place pilgrimage for Hindus.

Side by side in its religious endeavors, hundreds of thousands of Guyanese of all ethnicities and faiths will testify that the first and largest official building on that plot of land was the unmatched, one-of-its kind learning center - the Hindu College. Such an iconic, dynamic revelation of combining religion and education - the spiritual with the scholastic - in a developing country was an empirical amalgamation which soon transformed the education landscape beyond belief.

MODEL

This model concept was introduced to Guyana at the national level by a fearless Hindu missionary, His Holiness Swami Purnanandaji Maharaj. And almost sixty-years later the Guyana Hindu College remains the pristine center of learning for Guyanese from all walks of life.

It is the same notion of education development that Mr. Sobhraj is so passionate about: “Failure to educate our children properly and comprehensively is a failure that would be reflected upon our generation. So I am encouraging everyone to come out and support us. I also think that knowledge which encompasses the all-round discipline of life makes one a model citizen. And if the children who are part of these classes can inculcate the ashram values, whether they are social or

Saturday Classes



spiritual, then imagine the kind of leaders they will become tomorrow.”

Jay Sobhraj who injected the funds to see these ideas take flight at the America Sevashram Sangha and also donated the complete computer training centre there, is not looking for financial returns from his investment. “These classes are highly subsidized. The teachers volunteer their time and as such everyone can attend. The very small fee which is paid goes directly to the overhead costs at the ashram. And for those students who still cannot afford the nominal charges we have provisions in place for them. No one is ever turned away because of fees. We also love when parents join us and participate. It adds to the progress of the child. So this is not been done for financial gain. The only reward this team wants to see is that of the upward mobility of the children of our community.”

CLASSES

Coordinator of the Education Division of the Sangha, Mr. Nardeo Singh said that they have classes in computers: “We have Introduction to Computers, Computer Repairs and Troubleshooting. We also have classes which teach us how to fix or build computers. This helps students to further their skills and can even expand to computer engineering. There are also sessions to learn Micro Soft Excel and Quick Books Accounting,” said Singh who is one of the tutors also with thirty years corporate Information Technology experience.

Mr. Edward R. Surujbaali, who has completed 48 years as a teacher, and is retired, said he is preparing, “students for the High School SAT Tests. This ashram environment is very conducive to learning and essentially I am not limited by time here. I teach some of the things that are missing in the public schools and make sure each student have a strong grammar background before proceeding to the SAT test paper.” “I give guidelines. I teach strategies and techniques. I have them indulge in a lot of practice. And they see the value of the program. They have also become diligent. They spend a lot of time studying. They listen and so far the results have been very, very good. We have students who have been accepted in top rated colleges,” said the former teacher of Kitty Methodist, Good Hope Elementary (Essequibo) and Central High Schools, Guyana.

Asked if it is difficult teaching children who are part of a public school system, Edward said, “There are a distinct differences here. Firstly, if I were teaching in public school class room I would be restricted to 40-45 minutes. I have two to two-and-a half hours available in the ashram. I can take my time and handle students individually.

“Here I also get the co-operation and the support which encourages me from time to time to go out my own and to do things that would benefit the class,” said Surujballi.



Teacher Haniff



Teacher Wilson



Computer consultant; Nardeo Singh



Teacher Surujballi



Nardeo briefs students, visitors.



Personalized: Teacher Surujballi



Meetings and parents update



Certified,

**It is a greater work to educate a child,
in the true and larger sense of the word,
than to rule a state... William E. Channing**

Responding to public school mannerisms imported into a private institution, Edward said, "in every new class some do come with a public school attitude. It takes time to adjust but once you lay down the rules from the beginning and they see it's a serious program they do adjust.

"My first sentence in any new class," adds Surujballi, is that I look for "two things in a student - seriousness and interest. And when those two are there, I know that this student have set a goal for success. That motivates me. I actually get the parents involved also. Parents here are very receptive to the idea that they have a responsibility to be a part in their child's education and this is encouraging," Edward said.

Farah Akbar who teaches the verbal section for the Specialized High School Program (SHSAT) said that, "the students at the ashram are very, very interested in learning. They are motivated to do well. I bring to the students here things that I learnt as a public school teacher: Test taking techniques; test prep techniques. I also encourage a lot of reading - literature, newspapers and non-fiction works especially, said Farah who taught for four years in NYC Department of Education.

COMMAND

"I would like to commend the administrators here for supporting the educational development of the children of the community, and this, through low cost classes. It's good to know that such a place do exist and everyone should be encouraged to register," added Farah Akbar.

W.C. Bryant High School Teacher, Wilson J. Montero, also a volunteer at the Swami Vidyanandji Eductaion Center said: "teaching math in the ashram environment is incredibly easy. The children in my class are raised with very good moral values and are very good. They are well behaved and ambitious. They like to progress and this encourages me as teacher."

"Because the classes have a limited number of students also, it is very easy to address the particular need of each child and spend more time with them," said the affable Montero who has been teaching for the past twenty years and has a Degree in Electronic Engineering and Masters in Applied Mathematics

Montero said his classes are on Saturdays and most of his students are 11th graders - 15-17 years. "The administrators' efforts here and their objective in helping the community through these classes are very important. Helping a society grow through education is incredibly important and actually how a community should be changed," said former the Borough Manhattan Community College and occasional City College tutor.

Experienced Tutors

Like Edward Surujballi, Hazrat Haniff is a retiree with 46 years experience that spans from the Muslim Education Trust College (1962-1984) to Bryant High School (1985-2010). Currently assisting students who are in the 7-8th Grade working towards the entrance exams of the specialized high school, Haniff said, "the environment is very helpful. Religious organizations command a certain level of discipline that is conducive to learning. This I've experienced at the Muslim Education Trust in Guyana and the Catholic schools that I visited. The environment actually prepares the minds for learning. It makes the students receptive. And as a teacher one of the first things that appeals to me as teacher is having a class that is disciplined, ready to listen, ready to learn. Once we establish this, it all becomes easier."

"I also embrace this vision of the program's administrators. Firstly, I see them as very concerned, very dedicated and wanting to see our community advance through education is superb. So I am very happy to be a part of the team," declared Haniff.

When asked about the cross section of students, from different background and persuasions, Haniff said, "the important thing here is about human development. Dealing with all ethnicities and religions and not getting restricted to one particular religion or race, is a commendable goal and I am happy to be a part of it."

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