



Their grubby faces don't reflect the personal traumas that most of them must have been subjected to by the elders who occupy their small worlds. They run happily along the corridors of the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School. The dozen children stop in their tracks to holler a 'Good Afternoon' teacher as they notice Dilbur Parakh walking across, before continuing on their merry way.

Elsewhere, in St. Stanislaus School, another bunch of children are busy banging away on the computer, trying to solve a puzzle. Parakh knows every kid by name. Not surprising, as she is the founder of Aseema, the centre for street and underprivileged children, an organisation to which these children belong. The centre, located in the Chimbai village, recently adopted the Pali-Chimbai School and is refurbishing it with the help of Reliance. "It's not just a physical re-haul," she says. "We are also giving it educational inputs to improve the quality of education. Reliance is only paying for the overhaul and not for its maintenance and running."

Right now, Pali-Chimbai School is buzzing with activity. Students from the Sophiya Polytechnic were in the other day to help the kids of Aseema paint the white tiles that adorn their drinking water area. Everything in the school is being changed - from the drainage system to the smelly toilets, and the drab colours on the wall.



The room on the first floor, which functions as the Montessori for small children is a riot of colour. Toys, books and games lie strewn all around. The ever smiling, and earnest Parakh says, "We want to set up a library for older kids, who are studying in the English medium section of the school, and we are looking for donations. We are also short of trained teachers to help us improve the education standards here."

Most of the kids from Aseema attend the English medium section of the Pali-Chimbai School. There are a couple of kids who even go to St. Joseph's Convent and St. Stanislaus School, quite an achievement considering the fact that they come from extremely poor backgrounds.

St. Stanislaus School has begun a special computer class for the organisation's underprivileged children. They spend two hours every evening discovering the exciting world of computers. On the weekends yoga classes, judo sessions and the drama classes are taken by a National School of Drama graduate.

Clearly Aseema, which the lady describe as the 'child rights centre', has come a long way from its initial days, where Parakh herself had to go to the slums and exhort reluctant parents to send their children to study.

They now have 80 children on their rolls who are between two and 15 years of age. The small children are brought to the Aseema Montessori by volunteer mothers. The older children go to formal school. Often, the centre pays for their education. Some girls, aged 12 years old, are also given vocational training.

The beautiful things they created - crocheted batuas and some embroidered stuff - as well as artworks produced by the children, which include painted dinner sets, coffee mugs, bags, coasters and even bookmarks, are sold in exhibitions. Some of the money they earn goes back to the children's family, while the rest goes back into Aseema. "I want to make Aseema self sufficient," says Parakh.



Aseema is now looking for trained teachers and volunteers. They are also in need of financial help to run and maintain the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School. You can help by funding meals, books, library, uniforms, picnics and field trips, or a child's education. Or you could buy the products made by the children.

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