

Innovator Interview: Parikrma Humanity Foundation

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The CEI Team



The *Innovator Interview* blog series is a platform for program managers to share successes, challenges and key lessons learned from operating their programs with other members of the Center for Education Innovations (CEI) community.

This week we spoke with Anuradha Roychowdhury, Corporate Donor Account Head and Resource Mobilization Champion for the *Parikrma Humanity Foundation*. We asked Ms. Roychowdhury about Parikrma's 'end-to-end' model, innovative teacher training methods, their plans for increased government collaboration, and more.

Parikrma schools run from kindergarten through the 12th grade, part of what you call your 'end-to-end' model. What are the benefits from having students progress through these levels, all at the same school? I imagine it comes with challenges as well?

Parikrma: A student comes into the Parikrma Family at the age of five and into Upper Kindergarten. He or she graduates from Parikrma at grade twelve but continues to be supported by us through their undergraduate degree in the college / course of their choice.

This end-to-end approach is very important for our effectiveness. A student comes to us in the most formative and vulnerable period of their life and Parikrma is able to empower them not only with the best of education but also have time and space to develop their values, courage, confidence and ability to face the challenges of life. Girls and boys know they have someone to reach out to and are in a safe environment. We have the advantage of being able to track and take up remedial measures all along as a child progresses and walks this part of their life's journey.



Our continued engagement throughout a student's education also helps the children face challenges from the community more successfully. We provide constant counselling and community outreach programs that help us develop trustful relationships with students, but also allow us to work hand in hand with the parents.

Over the last 13 years, Parikrma schools have recorded 96% attendance and dropout rates of less than 1%, significantly better than most government run schools. What do you think drives this success?

Parikrma: Some of the factors that have helped us:

- Immediate follow up by the teacher and social worker if a student is absent for more than two days in succession.
- A robust health care program and immediate medical attention if a student is sick.
- Sensitive, alert teachers who identify a student who has begun to lose interest in class, or, is otherwise preoccupied.
- Professional counselling for students when faced with problems.
- An innovative, interactive fun way of teaching and learning to keep students interested.

As part of your efforts to provide high-quality teachers, your schools collaborate with the British Council Global School Exchange Program. How did this collaboration come about, and why do you think it is so important?



Parikrma: The exchange came about as the British C began as a year-long exchange of information on culture through e mails, letters and Skype between two corresponding classes and teachers on a common shared theme. The exchanges culminated in the teachers of the partner schools visiting each other's schools and spending a week in their partners' class.

This partnership was very important because not only did it give our teachers a view and experience of a classroom across the sea, but

also made it possible for them to learn and share best practices. It also motivated the teachers, who usually come from modest, middle class backgrounds, giving them a lifetime opportunity to visit another country.

The students were exposed to different cultures as well, and geography, history and language studies thus became more interesting. The skits and presentations that they did for each other gave them a great opportunity to hone and exhibit their skills, thereby further boosting their confidence.

Parikrma's community engagement efforts include domestic violence counseling, de-addiction camps, health camps, and financial awareness camps. What advice would you give to others seeking to add similar programs to their model?

Parikrma: It is important to build an excellent rapport with the community by being respectful, giving them dignity and treating them as equals. The community must believe in the organization – that it is truly there to make a difference to them. Also it is important for the community to know that you are there because you want to empower them and it is not a commercial venture for you. Frequent, one to one meetings with them and being with them in their celebrations and sorrows will build an everlasting bond.

At Parikrma, we have over the years built an excellent CDS or Community Development team which is really in touch with the communities from which our children come. These ladies are truly aware of and sensitive to the community's issues and are trusted to a high degree. The CDS team is absolutely integral to our community engagement efforts.

Parikrma's plans for the future includes expanding your Education Transformation Center to work with government school teachers. Why is it important for you to reach this group, and what do you hope to achieve?

Parikrma: Parikrma's mission is to give the poor an equal opportunity in life. It is not possible for Parikrma to build so many schools, or, accommodate all the children in need of access to quality education. However, through ETC, we will be able to inject the government school teachers with pride in their profession, in addition to infusing them with the Parikrma Way – the approach, skills, and joyful way of dealing with the entire process of teaching and learning. Through these teachers, we will now be able to impact the thousands of children in Government schools, who we would have otherwise not been able to reach out to.



*Anuradha Roychowdhury works in the Resource Mobilization Department of **Parikrma Humanity Foundation**, a Bangalore based NGO that runs 4 schools for 1700 slum children in the city. She works with partners interested in working in the area of education for underprivileged children, building a sustained relationship with these organisations and partnering with them in their CSR strategies and projects.*

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