

CHENNAI

Out of syllabus but highly relevant



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Four sustainability champions seek to promote eco-consciousness among school students

It's necessary to practise what you preach. And, it's just as important to preach what you practise, especially where sustainable living is concerned. For, there is an element of resistance in almost all of us to it. We would rather take the line of least resistance, settling for the convenient, than act keeping in mind, the interests of future generations.

Four city residents seem to have grasped this truth, instinctively, and they have been zealously promoting the eco-friendly practices that have done wonders for their immediate neighbourhoods. The four – Sumitra Srikanth, Ganga Sridhar, K.L. Bala and C.R. Ashok – have chosen school students as the target group. After all, it is these children who will lead out planet into the future.

The four have been making a difference, individually in their neck of the woods, and their paths have crossed due to their engagement with many sustainability groups, which include Solid Waste Management - People's Forum and Kapaleecharam.

In this new volunteering work, the four would like to be identified as EcoKconnectors. At present, they are guiding students of five schools – P.S. Senior Secondary School, Chettinad Harishree Vidyalayam, Vidya Mandir, Chennai Corporation Public School and Vana Vani Matriculation Higher Secondary School (which is situated on the campus of IIT-Madras). They want to engage with more schools across Chennai.

“Ours is team work. We chart out a plan, approach schools and create awareness. Having nature and eco clubs in schools is a great way to get started on sustainability practices. We play the role of mentors, and as such, we provide them with guidance and also chart out an action plan for them to work on,” says Ganga Sridhar.

Mylapore

At P.S. Senior Secondary School, with the support of the teachers, Bala has helped the students set up an eco-club. Divided into multiple groups, the students enforce eco-friendly practices and monitor them. For their art projects, they fashion models out of discarded and recycled material such as newspapers, plastic pipes, straws and mats.

The school principal Revathy says there are simple as complex layers to the awareness drive. An example of effective change in simple things. “For their birthdays, students are urged to plant a sapling on the campus and avoid bringing candies wrapped in plastic packaging. This initiative has been a success. The students not only bring and plant saplings on their birthdays, but also maintain the organic garden at the school where they have them planted. The students also segregate waste in colour-coded bins placed on the campus.”

R.A Puram

At Chettinad Harishree Vidyalayam too, students actively segregate and compost the waste generated on the campus. Recently, the students visited Thiruveedhi Amman Koil Street in

Mandaveli and met the members of TAKSRA to learn more about waste management, says Bala.

Sumitra Srikanth is greatly engaged with Vidya Mandir in its sustainability journey.

“When the school set up the terrace garden, I provided them with grow bags and seeds and offered my expertise through power-point presentation and videos. The teachers and students have taken an active interest in maintaining the garden and I am very happy to see the progress they have made,” says Sumitra.

The terrace garden is the result of the hard work and dedication of our students and staff, says Vidyashree Sarath, a teacher at the school. The school also has organic gardens on the campus that are maintained by students.

“We grow fruits and vegetables and also compost the waste on the campus. In fact, last Monday, we harvested bananas from a plant in the terrace garden,” she adds.

Recently, the school gifted 75 cotton saplings to Coast Gaurd personnel and also gifted saplings of various plants to the Class XII students who would be leaving the school next year.

“All the saplings were raised by our students. We try to be as creative as possible. This summer, I asked the students to plant the seed of the sweetest mango they had eaten, and they have all grown into saplings now,” says Vidyashree.

Guindy

Recently, C.R. Ashok helped Vana Vani Matriculation Higher Secondary School, where he is an alumnus, conduct a ‘green carnival.’ “We tried to avoid plastic as much as possible. We asked the vendors to bring in biodegradable plates and glasses instead of disposables. We held poster competitions for children on environmental themes,” he says.

Ganga Sridhar shares her knowledge and expertise with students and staff of the schools.

The ‘EcoKonnectors’ are urging more schools to come forward to take up green initiatives on their campuses and are willing to adopt schools to help them

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