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UNNEWS



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UNIC ALBUM

Bringing smiles to underprivileged children in Mumbai

“When the Maharashtra UN Association (MUNA) invited me to an event with *Mumbai Smiles*, I was not expecting at all what I saw”, said UNIC Director **Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman**. “It really made what we do worth it – reaching out to those who are just waiting for one small chance in life; a chance to develop their talent and follow their dreams”.

Mumbai Smiles began its work with a simple dream to support underprivileged children, in a selected number of *Balwadis* with support from Spain (founded by Jaume Sanllorente from Barcelona). It moved towards helping hundreds of children to gain access to quality educational opportunities clubbed with other developmental activities. “It is also empowering women as key change agents to provide them new opportunities”, said **Narendra Kumar Dundu**, the NGO’s Executive Director, India. “We work with local agencies and the government, in partnership with local NGOs.”

Mapkhan School is a humble yet large school in Andheri East, Mumbai. *Mumbai Smiles* was launching a new programme of Life Skills Education: Clarity of Thought and Knowledge. This would become part of the general



Photos: MUNA

syllabus so that students get through school with the core skills needed to complement a good academic education: Problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, building skills, empathy and coping with stress and emotions. **Mohd. Salim Mapkhan Shah**, the Trustee Principal recounted how his father had started this school as a means of imparting knowledge and education to the underprivileged.

Young children performed a play pitched against the scourge of child labour. They stole the hearts of the people and simple but basic truths were portrayed beautifully, to the extent that some of the children ended up in tears because of the high emotions. Most of the audience had moist eyes also. “To

see the confidence in these young children, I could well imagine that this school was transforming their present to provide a better future”, UNIC Director said. “UNIC will endeavour to continue to work with such partners, even beyond this one school”.

The evening saw scholarships being distributed to girl child beneficiaries of the Education for Girls project, giving them a chance to continue studying for at least another year). Certificates were distributed to Mumbai Smiles SEED Project women beneficiaries for various vocational training courses that they had completed and which had enabled them to open small businesses. MUNA office-bearers **A. A. Syed, Mohini Mathur** and **Ashraf Ahmed Shaikh** presented their thoughts on children’s rights and women’s empowerment. ■



Empowerment through vocational training

Street play training, tailoring lessons, skills training workshops, senior citizens' outings, road traffic camp for children, NGO fairs for youth, celebrating different United Nations Days – these are just some of the activities of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

"Our main aim is to empower women and create a safe world for them," said **Sarasa Isaac**, President, YWCA of Bombay. The YWCA's mission is to

reach out to victims of economic and social injustice and to those who are manipulated by socio-religious and political power.

A presentation was made on the outreach programmes of YWCA and dances and skits were performed by many of the empowered women who had received vocational training in order to set up their own businesses. "These are women from underprivileged communities and training has given

them a boost of confidence in their abilities, certainly a firm step in the right direction towards a future they have dreamt of", UNIC Director **Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman** said. "The United Nations Information Centre, with the help of the Maharashtra UN Association (MUNA), would certainly like to partner with the activities of the YWCA to make those dreams a reality".

MUNA President **A. A. Syed** recited a wonderful poem on the empowerment of women, while **Mohini Mathur** reminisced about her work with the YWCA since many years. **Ashraf Ahmad Shaikh** encouraged the women to pursue knowledge and skills training to acquire what is their birthright as daughters, sisters and mothers. ■



Photos: YWCA



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