



BALAVIKAS of FAIRFAX

Viveka Scholar/ PROCEED project
A Balavikas Education Initiative



Introduction and Context:

Viveka Scholar/ PROCEED project is being implemented by Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM), a NGO providing health care, education and community development services to very poor people who rarely have access to quality services through governmental channels. Started in 1984 by a group of medical college students, SVYM has attained national and international recognition for its highly effective delivery of high quality services. Currently it covers most districts in Karnataka and provides advice and guidance to several similar NGOs in other parts of India. SVYM experts are routinely invited by World Bank, WHO and other international organizations to share their experience with similar NGOs in other countries. More details including Annual reports and audited accounts of SVYM may be obtained by visiting their website: www.svym.org.

One of the largest projects being implemented by SVYM is called Premavidya, which is primarily focused on improving educational quality for poor children attending mostly government schools with sparse facilities, teacher shortages and several other disadvantages. Since 2006, Premavidya, funded by several major donors including DELL Foundation, has been introducing, in government schools, effective teaching techniques using advanced technology. The popularity and spread of the program is evidenced by its rapid expansion – from 300 students in 5 schools in 2006 to 40,000 students in 200 schools in 2011. It is expected to grow shortly to 100,000 students.

One of the focuses of Premavidya (<http://premavidya.svym.org>) is to select promising students in government schools and provide Math and Science enrichment courses starting as early as the 6th grade. Students who obtain at least 80% marks in their SSLC examinations are chosen as Viveka Scholars, and they are provided an opportunity through PROCEED (Professional College Entrance Education and Development) program in the form of coaching and support for admission to Engineering and Medical colleges. The PROCEED project was started in 2009 with donation of almost \$110,000 by Dr. G. V. V. Rao of Balavikas of Fairfax, enhanced by friends of Balavikas. SVYM was chosen for the donation by Dr. Rao as he knew the organization and its work very well since the year 2000. In fact both Dr. & Mrs. Rao personally did several stints over the years as volunteers with the organization and got to know all the principals, including the founders, and developed immense respect for their work and personal integrity.

Results accomplished so far:

Under the leadership of Naresh Bala, a US citizen NRI that returned to India with a passion to serve the poor, the overall Premavidya project as well as PROCEED project accomplished very impressive results. Of 413 Viveka Scholars, 373 got into colleges - 271 into science related programs, including 69 that got into engineering colleges and 3 into medical colleges. Rest got into Arts, Commerce and Vocational programs.

It must be realized that vast majority of these students would not have considered any college education, much less engineering, medical and other professional programs. They reached this far against insurmountable odds – poverty (typical profile is child of a house maid, tailor or rickshaw driver being raised by a single parent); first ever in the family to go to any school under pressure to give up education and become a wage earner etc. The Viveka Scholar program not only provides coaching and academic enrichment as described earlier, but also provides counseling, interaction with parents, assistance with college admission process and liaison with banks to obtain student loans etc. The underlying Premavidya program has considerable emphasis on social skills training in addition to academic support.

Where do we go from here:

Based on the impressive results achieved so far, there are plans to extend the scope to commerce/ business and other vocational fields, as well as expand the geographic coverage. The need is simply unlimited. If resources are available, there is no dearth of need. Therefore some friends of Balavikas (www.balavikas.org) decided to adapt it as a Balavikas program and strive to put it on a sustainable footing. The experience so far is that the per capita cost is about Rupees 30,000 (US\$ 600). It is a modest investment that can permanently change the life of a deserving student and his/ her family. It is expected that each successful student can eventually pull out about 20 people from the slums. The alternative is for the student, in spite of academic merit, to return to perpetual poverty cycle. It is the firm belief of the promoters, several who rose from poor backgrounds themselves, that this is a very effective way of paying forward for the success they achieved with the help of others in their own careers.

A very encouraging recent development is interest shown by Manipal Foundation (<http://www.manipalfoundation.in/>), a part of the Manipal Group, to match 100% donations made in US\$ as well as Indian rupees, for this program. Details are being worked out to finalize this arrangement.

For further information, please contact Vaidy Baskaran, PROCEED coordinator, Balavikas of Fairfax at (703) 655-6568, bvaidy@gmail.com.

Donations may be made to BALAVIKAS (please mention PROCEED on the Memo line) and mailed to: Vaidy Baskaran, 3731 Freehill Ln., Fairfax, VA 22033.