

“CHOOSING THE RIGHT PATH”



LIFE Trust has embarked on a new initiative as a complement to its career guidance programme known as Differential aptitude testing. More commonly known as DAT, this method has been used by school counsellors, personnel officers and psychologists since 1947 to assess the natural abilities and capabilities of adolescents. LIFE Trust's programme marks the first of its kind in India, as the tests were specially adapted for regional use and administered by trained career counsellors.

The rationale behind the development of the Differential Aptitude Tests is that since different kinds of abilities are useful in different jobs and school subjects, a suite of tests giving measures of several abilities is likely to be more useful than a single general ability score. Students are tested in eight different areas comprising Verbal Reasoning, Numerical Ability, Abstract Reasoning, Space Relations, Mechanical Reasoning, Clerical Speed and Accuracy, Spelling, and Language Usage. Once graded, they are then advised accordingly as to which career or vocation would suit them best.

LIFE Trust identified a need for an effective assessment program during the annual career counselling workshop “Ek Chothi Se Asha”. Six thousand students attended and were interviewed about their aspirations, abilities and interests. Whilst the vast majority were highly engaged and committed to furthering their careers, many were unsure as to which career

path to follow. In response to this, LIFE Trust, with generous support and funding from GlaxoSmithKline, sourced and adapted the current version of the DAT tests and rolled out the program in ten adopted MCGM schools to aid its students to recognise their strengths and abilities better.

The first battery of DAT tests (the first of its kind in the history of any municipal school in India) was conducted at the end of August 2010. Five specially trained counsellors were appointed by LIFE Trust to work full-time over the course of the programme, to co-ordinate and deploy the tests, collate the data and feed the results back to the test participants.

Initial reactions to the programme were muted ranging from indifference to resistance to bafflement. There were no comparable precursors to this programme and LIFE Trust's counsellors quickly realised that a pre-awareness program was necessary to educate school staff, pupils and parents on the importance and benefits of the tests. The high turnout rate (836 students attended out of 946) is a testament to the success of the pre-awareness program.

LIFE Trust counsellor Pallavi Arur recounts the process, “When we ran the first batch of tests, we found that some students were trying to copy each other's work! We had explained to them in the run up to the tests that there was no need to study as it wasn't an academic exercise, but I think the

concept went over their heads! So we stopped the tests right there and then and I explained to them that if they copied from their neighbour, and their neighbour's calling in life was to be a clerk, then they would also be advised to become a clerk as well and that they themselves were masking their true potential and abilities. They seemed to relate to that thankfully and we carried on.”

LIFE Trust's counsellors worked round-the-clock after the final tests had been conducted, to score, make reports, translate the test results to Hindi and compile the data from all the schools. Some obvious trends emerged from the results. The students excelled in the spatial visualisation thinking which commonly indicates a predisposition to careers in architecture, design, dentistry or any other profession involving technical or craft work. However, the poor performance in language usage, spelling and numerical and verbal reasoning-critical in any profession-suggest that these students are still not receiving adequate instruction in core subjects at school.

The results of the assessments were communicated back to parents and children a month from the test date via one-to-one counselling sessions. The sessions could not have come sooner for the children who avidly asked our counsellors every day from the test dates for their results!

The programme will culminate finally with a Career Mela in November where our test participants will be actively encouraged to interact with HR representatives from various multinationals and corporates in order to discuss their career options further. LIFE Trust has received positive coverage on its DAT pilot program from Afternoon, Mid-day and various mainstream news periodicals and will continue to progress and develop its holistic development career program forward.

Trustee Speak

Greetings,

We are proud to continuously bring out our newsletter every quarter. It is always a challenge to compress the activities and the work done in a couple of pages. However this quarter has been momentous as we have introduced a new programme in the schools.

Over 1100 students have benefited through the aptitude test and career guidance given by our Psychologists. Truly a wonderful achievement. We have inaugurated our first Model anganwadi in Bandra and hope to do 20 such in different parts of Mumbai. The students in all our 10 schools have been learning English through our digital classroom and the impact has been encouraging. We have ventured into the rural education space through our partnership with Essar Foundation for their school in Lonavla.

There is so much happening and so much still to do. We look forward to your continued support and encouragement.

Warm regards,

Poonam Lalvani



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PIECE OF LIFE

Our internship program kicked off at the start of July with 15 MBA students from the Narsi Monji Institute of Management Studies. Students volunteer once a week in various capacities. Currently, they are helping LIFE Trust conduct a social audit.

On 26th July, LIFE Trust hosted a meeting with all the headmasters of the Public Partnership Cell (an organisational body for BMC schools). The meeting was held to introduce and inaugurate the Learning Disability counseling project.

On the 21st of August, LIFE Trust organized a Rakhi making competition with sixty-five students from the Abhudyanagar Municipal School. The girls put in a great deal of effort and brought all their own decorative materials from home. The event was a great success and culminated in a Rakhi tying ceremony.

This quarter, LIFE Trust rolled out another series of its popular Yoga and Karate extra-curricular program in all ten BMC schools.

On the 7th September, all 10th standard students from three adopted schools celebrated Teachers day. Students dressed up as their teachers and attempted to keep their fellow classmates in order! Needless to say, all students realized what a challenge teaching can be and expressed their gratitude for the teachers' efforts at the end of the day.

All throughout September, LIFE Trust conducted a set of workshops on Attitudinal Change at Worli Sea Face School and at G.K Marg School for teachers. Sixty-eight teachers in total attended and learnt how to channel the power of positive thinking into their professional lives.

LIFE's teacher training workshops (an ICDS associated program) continues within the Anganwadis in Bandra, Dharavi and Shivari. This batch of workshops were attended by forty one teachers and primarily focused on interpreting and communicating with children.

Special thanks this quarter is due to the Shri Chandrababa Mandir Trust, a local temple trust active in Worli for providing over a thousand notebooks to LIFE Trust's adopted schools.



SPOTLIGHT ON COMPUTER EDUCATION

IT skills have become even more critical for tenth standard students since the advent of online only applications for Junior College. Computer access for students in municipal schools however is often limited or sadly lacking, which accounts for the lower number of applications from this segment. LIFE Trust recognized the acute need for improving IT skills within municipal schools and in response to this, scaled up resources for the Computer Education Programme.

CitiGroup, kindly donated a hundred secondhand computers to all ten LIFE Trust adopted MCGM Schools and eighteen special schools. These will facilitate computer learning for over 7000 children from 5th to 10th standard. LIFE Trust devised a program of learning as part of the national curricula and will continue to administer and provide all support for this initiative.

Neeta Khajuria, explains LIFE Trust's role- "Right from sourcing the computers, to training our LIFE coaches to teach the kids, to providing AMC personnel (IT support) to maintain the computers on a monthly basis, we are committed to ensuring that every child receives the IT support and learning that is mandatory to his/her studies. We are very keen that every single child in our adopted schools is tech-savvy. We unfortunately, cannot rely on the system in municipal schools to provide that. How will our kids every get into college and find a job if they don't have some level of skill with computers?"

LIFE Trust installed the computers in their own dedicated labs and worked with the schools to review the curricula. Two dedicated LIFE Coaches were entrusted to teach the curricula covering a range of topics such as the history of computing, the anatomy of computers, basic troubleshooting, Windows, Notepad, Paint, Microsoft Office applications and Internet browsing and email. Thus far, the response has been very positive. Students were initially curious but wary of touching the computers in case they accidentally caused any damage. But gradually curiosity won through and the labs are now in constant use during school hours.

Regular tests are conducted with all the students on the program to assess their competency performing key tasks after every unit of the syllabus. Thus far, a 75% pass rate has been achieved across all schools, which is an outstanding achievement considering the history of computer education in these schools. Moving forwards, LIFE will continue to provide a strong level of support and involvement to aid its municipal schools enter the digital age.

CHILD CARE CENTER



Model Anganwadi - Bandra East

Child Care Center(CCC) programme is aiming towards bringing qualitative changes in preschool learning. The programme run in collaboration with ICDS for the improvement of Anganwadis in Bandra Dharavi and Shivari – Wadala. In the quarter from July to September 2010 trainings are held for 41 supervisors on communication skills. 744 Anganwadi workers are covered under training on Children and their emotional needs and puppet making. These trainings helped them to bring out their hidden skills and also to use the puppets as teaching aid in their Anganwadi .

LIFE also works for adolescent girls. Training on Rakhi making and paper bag making is provided to 70 girls in Dharavi, Bandra and wadala.

The concept of model Anganwadi has been inaugurated on September 30th, 2010 in Bandra which encourage teachers to improve the quality of teaching. The Anganwadi is the model for joyful learning. Angawadi Centre in Maharashtra Nagar located at Bandra is with beautiful wall painting, educational toys, drawing books, clay, mats, writing tables crayons and water pot.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE



Mehndi Course for Adolescent Girls Group - Bandra

LIFE Trust recently began working with adolescent girls in the slums of Bandra, Wadala and Dharavi to equip them with career-building skills. LIFE aims to improve earning opportunities for these girls and provides vocational training to facilitate this.

The current forty day training course focuses on the art of Mehindi application. The course caters to girls between the ages of sixteen to twenty-one and not more than fifteen girls are taught at any one time. LIFE Trust subsidises upto 50% of the course costs for the girls. The participants contribute the remaining costs (Rs 150) which ensures a level of commitment from the course participants.

Ex-attendees who have successfully completed the course usually start earning immediately as mehindivallis, mehindi saleswomen or by running mehendi classes of their own. LIFE Trust is proud to report that the average monthly income that is being drawn by these girls is between Rs. 700 – 1200.

ECO-GANPATI



Ganesh Festival at LIFE Trust

LIFE Trust went green during Ganpati Chaturthi and opted for an eco-friendly, clay Ganpathi statue. Upon taking receipt of our five-foot Ganpati effigy, we immediately decked him out in suitable attire and gave our offices a festive makeover.

Ganpati stood guarding the entranceway to our offices for five days in the build up to the Visarjan, whilst we celebrated each day of the Chaturthi with poojas and other festivities. On the fourth day, we invited some amazing Bhajan singers over to our offices for a Kirtan. They sang for over two hours for us and would have stayed longer had they not been asked to do another Kirtan elsewhere.

On the fifth day we took Ganpathi in our Trustee's car to Hajjali. This was no mean feat, but we got him there in one piece in the end!

After the final offering of coconuts, flowers and camphor, we carried our Ganpati into the sea to immerse him. Just before immersion, we whispered our wishes into Ganpati's ear. As we wished Ganpati farewell, we hoped that we'd see our wishes come true. And we hoped that next year would be as much fun!

MAX OUT!



10th Std. Students being felicitated by Max Retail

On the 13th July, fourteen top S.S.C students from ten of LIFE Trust's adopted MCGM schools were invited to inaugurate the new MAX Store Mega Mall, in Goregaon. The event was organized by LIFE Trust to acknowledge the outstanding results that these students had achieved in their studies.

On arriving at the mall, the students were welcomed and asked to select a new outfit to wear for the occasion from the store. They looked absolutely radiant in their new outfits, and gathered with Mrs. Poonam Lalvani to cut the ribbon for the inaugural ceremony.

The students also lit diyas and chanted the Gayatri Mantra to give the store an auspicious start. The cake cutting ceremony followed, and needless to say, was appreciated by all. Mr. Vasanth, the CEO of Max India, was also present and gave the students certificates to mark the occasion and acknowledge their exemplary performance. It was smiles all around as Mr. Vasanth wished the students luck for the future.

CHANGING LIVES

Rakesh Rajbhar, a sixth standard boy has earned the name of little scientist in his school Globe Mill Passage, a MCGM school in Worli with his ingenious 'Rotating Krishna' invention.

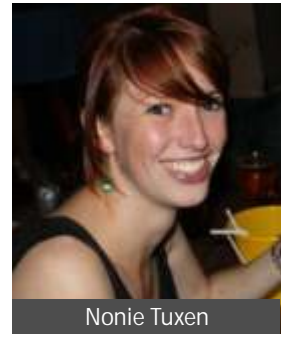
LIFE Trust run a project called the Monthly Awareness Programme in all adopted schools which aims to give students supplementary 'LIFE' skills and create awareness of a range of everyday topics outside the national curriculum. This month, LIFE coaches gave a seminar on electricity and tasked pupils to create an electrical device of their own.

Rakesh, a quiet boy not usually known for his application to his studies, surprised everyone with his project. Rakesh created a six inch rotating Krishna effigy with nothing more than a Krishna effigy, a plastic pedestal, a car battery, pencil cells and used wires. Since winning the prize for this month's MAP assignment, Rakesh has been enjoying the respect and adulation from his peers and teachers alike. He has had a profound influence on all his friends and peers who themselves have begun to create their own 'toys' and gadgets.

Inspired by his success in this program, Rakesh has decided to take his hobby more seriously and is regularly producing new and exciting gadgets for all to enjoy.

VOLUNTEER SPEAK

Awareness is the key to change. If the community doesn't know about the plight of those who are less privileged, how can we possibly work towards changing their lives and destinies? This is why I spent six weeks working with LIFE Trust to help spread the word about their wonderful work in Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai.



Nonie Tuxen

During my time with LIFE, I realised that the small privileges we take for granted at school in the West (such as access to and the ability to use a computer, sporting classes, craft activities, and exam revision) can make a world of difference to the success of a child in India.

LIFE Trust's work is so valuable because it provides disadvantaged children a platform for personal and academic growth which carries the power to change their lives. A child who succeeds in school begins the process of succeeding in life.

If you would like to volunteer with one of the LIFE Trust programmes please visit our website or contact us at empower@lifetrustindia.org

THE ART OF LIFE



This Rakshabandan, LIFE Trust organized a special event for the orphans at the Family Home Guild of Service in Dadar. LIFE Coaches Reshma Khedekar, Nayana Mestry, Sweedal Lopez and Rajeshree Choudhery spent the day at the orphanage with nineteen of its little 'residents' to celebrate this family orientated event.

The program began with an introduction to LIFE Trust's work and brief explanation of its activities. LIFE coaches were mindful of the youngsters' attention spans, and quickly moved onto ice-breaking games. The LIFE coaches then followed by recounting the story behind this festival and sang traditional songs in celebration of it. After doing Aarti, the LIFE coaches tied rakhis on the youngsters' wrists and then the noise level went up a couple of notches as group games began.

The children were thrilled and very excitable, the program ended with a group dance and sweets were distributed. The event was a big success; the Institute Manager thanked our LIFE coaches profusely and requested that we return on other such festive days to celebrate with the youngsters.

LIFE IN THE NEWS

