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Article - His goal dignity for slum children

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# His goal dignity for slum children

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A visit to this nondescript slum cluster in Vikaspuri throws up many surprises. The first ones to greet you are 70-odd street children who come rushing with their arms stretched out. They say 'hello, how are you?' much as a ritual and don't let you settle down till you've shaken hands with each of them. These English-speaking slum kids are the proud products of Angel Academy — a one-room shanty located in a dim-lit corner of this cluster — run by their beloved 'bhaiya' — Sylvester Peter.



meets them sharp at 5am every day for soccer and yoga practice. The children go to school and the academy starts again in the evening when Sylvester returns from work. His dedication, professional training and tireless attitude have instilled dreams in these children. Unmindful of their parents' reluctance and sketchy backgrounds, these kids now aspire to become teachers, engineers and even Zinedine Zidane'.

Sylvester says, "Many of them, including girls, have the potential to become national-level soccer players. They play really well and I would make sure they rise and shine." As a routine set by their mentor, the students have to wake up at 4am daily. "Each senior student has been given the charge of a set of slums. The older students go to the slums allotted to them to wake up the younger children at 4 every morning," he says.

"Students self-evaluate their work," Sylvester says, adding that he makes sure his students learn English so they can be eligible for the corporate world later in life. "I don't guarantee to make them doctors or engineers. But they will definitely

come good citizens," Sylvester says proudly.

The students agree. Sandeep, who has been with Sylvester for 16 years, says, "Bhaiya nahi hote toh main faltu ghumta rehta. (Had he not been around, I would have roamed about aimlessly)." Sandeep has now resumed studies and plans to become a professional photographer. Twelve-year-old Taqbir, who was a drug-addict earlier, says, "My classmates in school are jealous because I have bhaiya who taught me English."

The 36-year-old has been working for the betterment of such children since he was 13. Though Sylvester's three siblings studied in a convent, his parents preferred to put him in a Tamil government school.

There he came across the plight of his classmates, a majority of whom came from poor families. Soon, helping them out became his way of life. Friends may call him mad, his marriage may not have worked, but his passion for these children has hardly dipped. He manages the academy single-handedly giving up all he

earns. "Some NGOs and spiritual gurus offered help in the past but they always have strings attached. Political workers also came to meet me during elections but my children chose to turn them away," Sylvester recalls.

He has provided the children with soccer kits, books, pencils and a computer. The immense love his disciples have for him shows. However, the rigid attitude of parents often acts as an obstacle, besides the lurking fear of demolition of the slums. But Sylvester has vowed to keep the show going. "I am working towards moving out of the slums to a proper academy I'm trying to form a trust and will do it on my own if nobody comes forward to help."



For 70 slum kids, Yoga trainer Sylvester Peter holds out hope. These English-speaking children are the proud products of Angel Academy, run by Peter in a one-room shanty

Sylvester has been grooming, training and teaching slum children in this makeshift academy for nearly a decade. He's no less than a boon for these underprivileged children, many of whom were ragpickers, petty thieves, housemaids and even drug addicts. Now, they go to school, dress up well, do not abuse, and 'take bath every day' — a criterion they now deem essential for being a part of Angels.

Sylvester, a holistic trainer by profession, trains children aged between 3 and 20 years. He

