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Rags to robes: Kids graduate from streets to schools

By Priyamvatha P

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THREE years ago, Ramana (11) did not even dream he would ever hold a book in his hands which he used only for seeking alms. Ramana was forced to beg from passersby in Shastri Nagar as his grandparents depended on him. But on Saturday, Ramana, dressed in a gown and with a mortar board, walked up to the stage to receive his certificate for successfully completing his kindergarten.

Like him, 40 other children were excited to become 'little' graduates at the convocation organised by their school 'Siragu Montessori' in Chennai. The school, which has classes upto Std VI, educates children who

were into begging or working as labourers. About 90 percent of the students of this residential school, run by Suyam Charitable Trust, were engaged in begging.

Now, after dreaming about education for many years, the kids have moved to a new beginning. Ramana, who can tell symbols of all the elements, says: "I learnt all this in just two years. And my grandparents are very happy after seeing me receive the certificate." However, Ramana refused to talk further about his past. VUma, managing trustee of Suyam, says, "We ensure that the kids forget their past. Now they are just school children and will not be talking about their old jobs."

True to it, the kids were excited about chemistry, animals, wildlife, flags and many more things that

were taught to them. Arumugam, a Class I student, who came to know about flags only last year, has already started learning about flags of other countries.

And Poongudi was enthusiastic about the books given to her on the convocation day. "Kids like me have suffered from many ailments on the streets, but there was nobody to help us. So, I want to become a doctor and treat children," she says.

"We use flash cards to teach students based on the 'Clendomen Method,'" says Uma. "There is a lot of activity-based education, so they pick up fast. Most of the kids speak good English. Our school is associated with the International Montessori Society."

The idea to hold a convocation day was to give the children a feel-



Children at the convocation organised by Siragu Montessori in Chennai on Saturday — Express photo by P Jawahar

ing that they had achieved something and would continue their education, says Uma, adding that "They are all first-generation learners and have to be motivated."

And little Sarath Kumar is already brimming with hopes for his future. "I am a big boy now. I have to study more to get more certificates like this."



ACHIEVERS: Law Minister D. Jayakumar interacting with the students of Siragu Montessori School during the convocation.

An achievement for these street children

Siragu Montessori School held its first convocation on September 17 celebrating the achievement of 40 platform children and other deprived children in completing two years of formal education at the school.

Certificates distributed

The guest of honour at the function was Minister for Law and IT, D. Jayakumar. He handed over certificates of convocation and commemorative books to the children who have succeeded in pursuing their education despite their disadvantaged background.

The Minister spent considerable time interacting with the children.

Special guests also distributed certificates and gifts to the students. The guests included

Dr. J.S. Rajkumar of Lifeline Rigid Hospitals, P. Mahalingam of Presidency College, Ravendran, Palavedu Panchayat and P. Nanasiyayam, Principal, Maharishi Vidhya Mandir, Chetpet.

Cassette released

Suyam Charitable Trust, which runs the school, also brought out a cassette containing songs on human values. About 100 cassettes are to be distributed to schools in tsunami affected regions in the State. The cassette is also for sale, the proceeds of which will go towards the social activities of Suyam.

For cassettes, contact M. Muthuram (98403 65819) and V. Uma 94444 04822

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