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"The Best Out of Waste to Turn Trash into Cash" Empowering the Disadvantaged

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Abstract: Waste management disposes of the products and substances that we can use in a safe and efficient manner. Rapid urbanization, industrialization and globalization are exerting a severe pressure on the environment through many ways including production of huge quantities of organic solid waste. Hence the environmental problems have emphasized for better utilization of waste for various purposes involving suitable cost-effective technologies. The practice of best out of waste has arisen out of the concept that there is an institutional social responsibility towards the disadvantaged and the marginalized sections of society. In response to this consciousness, the department of social work, Maris Stella College launched an on-going programme in the year 2001 in collaboration with non-governmental organizations called 'Best out of Waste to Turn Trash into Cash'. The participants are child laborers, rehabilitated street children, mentally and physically challenged children, HIV/AIDS victims, trafficked victims at swadhar homes and women from various self help groups

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PRACTICE

- *To motivate and enhance the potentials of socially challenged women and children.*
- *To empower and enable them to become income generators and to thus raise their self- esteem.*
- *To train them in optimum use of waste to produce eco-friendly products and to discourage hazardous waste.*

THE CONTEXT

In working with the socially challenged, calls for special strategies and techniques that would empower them for their own development. To realize the objectives of the practice, the department of social work decided to initiate a project that would impart training in producing art and craft out of waste and then displaying and selling it through an exhibition cum sale. The programme required multi pronged approach if it was to be successful. An understanding to make a collaborative effort from the college and non- governmental organizations was the first step in designing the practice. The various other steps were awareness sessions, professional training, time management, human resource management, marketing techniques and bargaining skills. Purchasing and social accounting were other aspects that needed to be addressed in implementing the practice.

THE PRACTICE

In order to implement this practice, various non- governmental organizations were contacted for collaboration. Those who are willing were then involved in the planning and implementation process. Simultaneously, the department of social work holds awareness sessions for the new batch of students and new faculty. Professional training is imparted by professional who are creative and have artistic skills. Senior children who have developed skills also train the young children. Input sessions are given by the department of social work on the importance of waste management and its benefits. The need to balance accounts and the concept of auditing are also explained.

It became evident, during implementation that the inherent curiosity in the children was aroused. Creation of something unique out of waste is a constructive means of expression. To create a single piece of useful product takes hours of labor and the creator needs to follow a series of steps requiring memorization, which in turn helps in concentration.

The practice helps develop life skills and creation of useful waste management goes beyond verbal language to communicate feelings that might not otherwise be expressed. When the participants explore ideas, they are testing possibilities and working through challenges, leading to development of problem solving skills. Creativity also fosters positive mental health by allowing a child to show individual uniqueness as well as success and accomplishment.

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Children are invited to experiment and encouraged to push themselves to finish an entire project, which builds in them confidence to pursue their interests and eventually choose meaningful careers.

The exhibitions are organized in the college auditorium every year. All the pieces of art and craft made by the participants are displayed for sale. The items they display are study materials, wall hangings, interior decorations, frames, designs, flowers, play items, bags, penholders objects made from cell phones and CDs. Besides e- waste children are encouraged to make use any waste materials for creative products or art and craft that could be sold for income generation. The exhibition is open to the general public and sales worth many lakhs are transacted over fifteen years. Much appreciation is also registered as the event raises awareness among the campus and the public by show casing the inherent abilities among these disadvantaged children.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

The practice started as pilot project in 2001 was in collaboration with just one NGO. It now has the involvement of up to twenty NGOs which in itself is an indication of the success of the practice. Many of the participants showed marked improvement in life skills and several have found job openings in multimedia centers, album designing and interior home designing centers, as designers in newspapers and as art and craft teachers. Every year, five hundred children join the field. In the last 15 years, six thousand children have been empowered to take up waste management programmes in their respective places. From the academic perspective, this practice has served to give invaluable field experience to the students of social work. They have also become more creative and sensitive towards the importance of waste management.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Time management was a major challenge as the practice is a time consuming process. Another difficulty encountered was in finding professional trainers to train the participants. not all the agencies are able to provide internet access to their participants who are therefore, unable to tap the vast resources of the net in providing ideas of e- waste management. There are also problems in storage and transportation. The finished products are subject to damage during transportation to the venue of display and sale. The non-governmental organizations are situated far and wide posing difficulties for regular monitoring. This practice of waste management for cash has been in force more than 15 years and it is most fulfilling involvement by the disadvantaged children for their empowerment of self esteem and economic development.

CONCLUSION

For decades, waste management was the simple disposal of waste material to landfills or other designated sites. While much of the change in how waste disposal is viewed has been impacted by a growing consciousness of a healthy environment, there has also been a shift in how waste materials are viewed by residents, businesses and government. Finally one can say that creative use of waste management can empower people socially, economically and bring in them self confidence and self realization of one's own potentials and hidden creativity.

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