



Today's school kids, tomorrow's journalists

● Chandni U

They have a student reporter ID card, a visiting card and they experience the pride and joy of sitting with the mainstream media during city events. Just the sound of it is exciting, isn't it? Youth of Chennai, Energetic and Enthusiastic (YO-Cee) is a cyberspace where children report news from their neighbourhood and school campus. It offers training under the annual student reporter programme. What's more interesting is the story behind the making of the platform.

Meet R Revathi, the founder who was once a banker. She narrated the beginning of YO-Cee that started out as a scribble magazine, somewhere in Mumbai. "After 17 years as a banker, I quit my job and began writing financial stories. This was in 2003 when I lived in Mumbai. The idea came with an observation," she recalls. "I noticed that children had a lot of things to say that grown-ups had no clue about. One day, I got them to sit together and write about their experiences, something new they saw or heard. This turned into our first scribble magazine."

One manuscript would be circulated among households each day by a volunteer. It caught on quickly and became successful, parents began to fund the production. "Thirty six pages, one copy and its production was done on our dining table. It was an amazing experience but it came to an end after I moved back to Chennai." It took a year for Revathi to develop the idea of a blog. This was when the Internet was considered unsafe for children. "On August 20, 2006, I held a workshop in which 30 children and parents turned up. I advertised through the local newspapers. There were no laptops then, so we brought a huge computer, explained the idea to them and got amazing response," she smiles. The title YO-Cee, the background colours for each section of the website, the type of stories, everything was decided by the children. And so it began.

As it happens, every successful idea takes a beating. Revathi experienced that with her first batch. "There were over a 100 applications and we accepted around 50. That was a mistake. Unable to keep track of everyone and provide them with proper training, many dropped out. Since the second batch we have only taken 25 students. After completing a masters in journalism, I prepared a training programme for kids. I'm proud to say that it has been 10 years and the children continue to write and improve."

Sharing a few proud reporting instances, she says, "Australian cricketer Mike Hussey visited our cricket coaching programme for boys and girls. Our reporter was sitting among the other newspapers and media channels, with her ID card around her neck and visiting cards in her pocket. When she finally asked a question on what Chennai thinks about women playing cricket and how many even take it up, Mike Hussey was impressed and so were the others. The reporter told us she was applauded and received a standing ovation too. I was delighted to hear it. Isn't that what boosts a child's confidence?"

YO-Cee reporters have reported on health, social, civic and cultural issues. Though they would not be able to contribute to YO-Cee after they complete school, they promise to continue reporting, writing and learning.

For details, visit www.yocce.in

FROM THE STUDENTS

Name: Gopika K

Class: 12

School: KFI, Adyar

With YO-Cee: Two years

Things improved in the neighbourhood only after I got into YO-Cee. I began to notice potential stories in my city. Whenever I cover events, I always think about what my readers would want to know, what they should be aware of and give them a feel of their city!



Name: Dhurai A N

Class: 8

School: Everwin Vidhyashram

With YO-Cee: Three years

Through YO-Cee, I have covered many sports tournaments. I've written about 25 articles and someday, I'll be a sports journalist. Revathi constantly reminds us that reporting is like a pyramid with many sides, not just one.



Name: Ananya Balaji

Class: 9

School: Sri Sankara Senior secondary, Adyar

With YO-Cee: Four years

YO-Cee gave me a great platform for reporting. It provided flexibility for me to enjoy reporting and manage school work at the same time. I would love to interview JK Rowling and I'm looking forward to the kutchcheri during the

Marghazhi season.

Reporters must have an eye for details and passion for writing.

