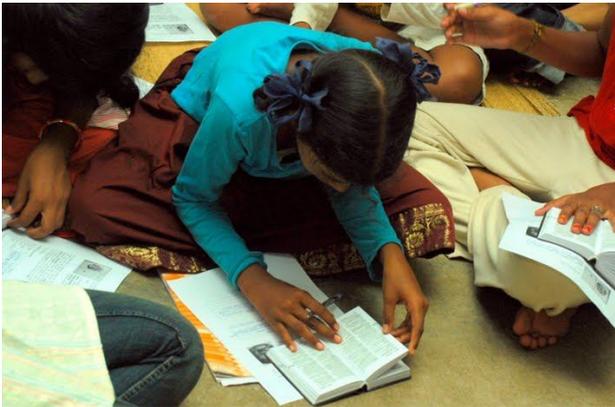# Deepam

*A BITSian initiative readying youngsters for the information age of tomorrow.*

**Meera Sivakumar**, 2000A7PS013

Clay P. Bedford famously said, *"You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives."*

Deepam, a non profit organization with the goal of bridging the divide between literacy and education among the lesser privileged children of Chennai, was started by Karthikeyan Vijayakumar, BITS Batch of 2000, and a few friends, in April 2008. It was conceived to instill in a child the curiosity to learn and to give him the "keys"



to the greatest pool of knowledge out there, the Internet, by suitably augmenting school curriculum. Along with it was born *BridgeTheDivide* - a group to unite people who are keen on 'Lighting the spark and leveling the playing field' for these children.

Deepam was officially rolled out in the summer of 2008 when a group of volunteers, mostly fresh graduates and working professionals in Chennai, with a couple of their own laptops, started teaching at Nalamdana (a self help group) in Perungudi, Chennai. Nalamdana had a mix of bubbly, reserved, bright, boisterous and quiet kids; but with clear and big dreams for the future. During the course of the next few weeks, the children were taught how to handle laptops, introduced to the Windows operating system

and other tools like Microsoft Paint and Microsoft Office. The summer session lasted a few weeks was a great experience for volunteers and for the children too, going by their enthusiasm and performance in the informal end-of-session hands on tests. Over the last one year, Deepam has expanded to four centers (one school and 3 community centers) in Besant Nagar area of Chennai. Children are taught for 2 hours every weekend. We currently now reach out to about 120 children through our weekend classes, with plans of further expansion in the near future.

Though we started off teaching computers, we realized with time, that in order to fully appreciate what the internet has to offer, the children needed to hone their reading comprehension & basic communication skills in English. We therefore streamlined our curriculum and now focus on four pillars - each complimenting the other - English, Computers, General Awareness and Personality Development. This, we felt, would be a great way to sustain and enhance the intellectual curiosity of the kids while also putting them on the track of the information explosion. And finally, what good is any information or idea if it isn't communicated effectively? Soft skills and interpersonal skills are as important as any of the 'hard' skills. We try to encourage the kids to be forthcoming, bold and speak without fear in front of the class. We also discuss famous achievers in several fields, and qualities one could imbibe from their lives. We constantly tweak and improvise our lessons based on active feedback from volunteers.

With a dedicated bunch, we are now onto our second year at Deepam. Our aim is to reach 1000 kids by 2015. Volunteers have been our biggest strength in our journey so far. One can contribute to Deepam in many ways – volunteer to teach at any of our centers, work on the curriculum or raise

funds. We also welcome college students interested in community service to intern with us during their breaks.

If you are interested in volunteering, donating laptops, money or material or getting to know us better, please write to us:

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