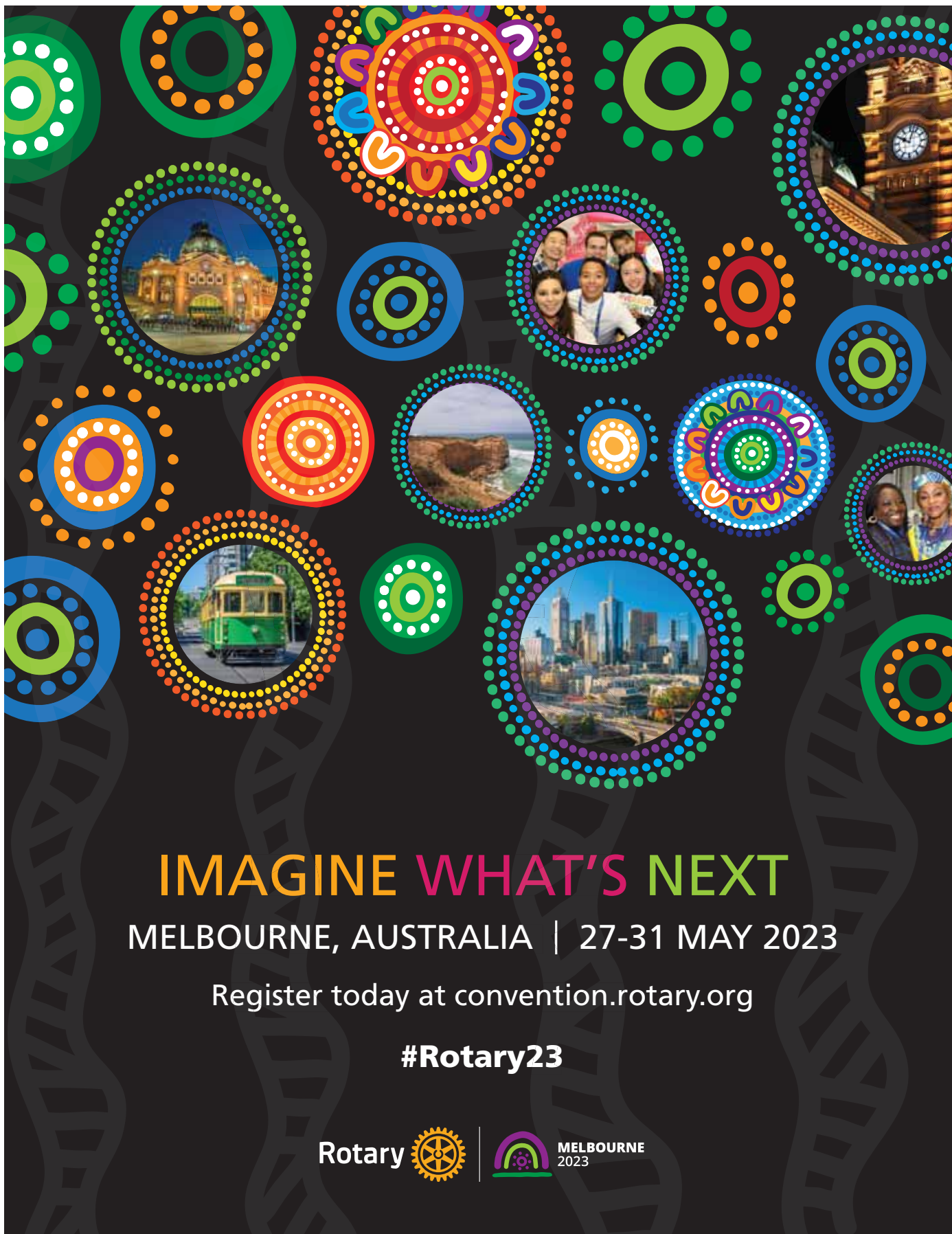


Rotaract NEWS





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RI Director **AS Venkatesh**

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As a Rotaractor, while giving, you will also receive

In this issue, we share with you the incredible experiences of 12 young people from six countries who participated in Rotary's youth exchange programme. These students were hosted by Rotarians in Pune and taken on a journey to Assam and Meghalaya to explore the natural beauty, culture and diversity of the Northeast. Since 1929, Rotary has been sending youth around the world to experience new regions and cultures and gain unique exposure to become well-rounded global citizens. These students from Spain, Germany, Japan, Italy, France and Brazil were thrilled to get a rich experience of the customs and lifestyles of the regions they visited while enjoying the hospitality of their host Rotarian families.

If you have a passion for travel and meeting people from different backgrounds, this programme is a life-changing opportunity for you.

Another inspiring story in this issue is about RID 3212's flagship project, *Yadhumanaval*, targeted at improving the self-esteem and self-confidence of students through special 'listening sessions' addressed

by expert speakers. The project highlights the challenges many teenage girls in our communities face with low self-esteem and inferiority complex. These sessions give them the confidence to speak up about their problems and find solutions. You, dear Rotaractors, can learn from this project and develop your own similar initiative to empower the youth around you. Because emotional wellbeing is as important as physical fitness to succeed in life. In the bargain, you will be surprised at the amount of leadership and organisational skills that such a programme will give you in return.

We also highlight the Rotaract Club of Medice, a 3,000-member-strong e-club that comprises medical students and professionals from India and other countries. While all their service projects are focused on healthcare for communities, in line with their vocations, the professional development for the members is achieved through the vast number of technical courses held in collaboration with experts in the field.

Rotaract is not only about giving to the community and those less fortunate than you. Belonging to Rotaract, and through it to the larger Rotary family, opens so many doors to you, bringing you an amazing number of opportunities. In addition, the community service projects that you will take up along with your fellow Rotaractors will give you back so much. While you give your passion, energy and dedication to the beneficiaries, what you will receive from them, gratitude and smiles of course, but also a deep insight into how people in different strata of society live and think, will deepen your understanding. When combined with the experienced mindset of Rotarians, you have a powerful force that can elevate the world to new heights.


Jaishree
Deputy Editor

India's Northeast fascinates youth exchange students

Rasheeda Bhagat

When RI District 3131 was hosting a group of 12 youngsters from six different countries under Rotary's Youth Exchange (RYE) programme, "they felt that these students should spend about 10 days in the Northeast, particularly Assam and Shillong, and get a taste and feel of our culture and lifestyle," recalls Nilesh Agarwal, incoming governor of RID 3240.

Even as the RID 3131 youth programmes chair Shobha Nahar was trying to find a Rotary connection in RID 3240, Agarwal came to know that a group of foreign students were in Pune for a one-year youth exchange programme and were looking for a partner in his district. As a youth exchange chair of his district (3240), he immediately connected with Shobha and offered to

partner with RID 3131 to bring over the students to Assam and Meghalaya and give them an exposure to the natural beauty and diversity of the Northeast.

He set about making arrangements along with his incoming district YE chair Priyama Goswami and on Oct 4, when the team of 12 students, along with Shobha, landed at the Guwahati airport, DGE Agarwal was there to receive them along with Priyama, a member of RC Gauhati South, its president Rajesh Batra and AG Bibhuti Dutta.

RYE is an international student exchange programme for students. Since 1929, RI has been sending young people around the world to experience

new cultures, and get a unique experience in becoming well-rounded adults and citizens of the world. Priyama, who also heads the women's empowerment team in her 76-member club, where 60 per cent of the members are women, and is secretary-elect of her club, recalls that when DGE Agarwal called her about the opportunity to plan a 10-day programme for 12 students from Spain, Germany, Japan, Italy, France and Brazil, she was very excited. "We set about the task of taking them to places such as Kaziranga, Majuli island, Cherrapunji and Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. They were also invited for the Durga pooja held in Guwahati and participated in the Dusserah celebrations at the Nehru stadium."

As RI encourages the exchange students to be hosted by Rotarian families



RC Gauhati South president Rajesh Bhatra with the RYE students.



DGE Agarwal, Priyama Goswami, RID 3240, RID 3131 YE chair Shobha Nahar and YE students with Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma (centre).

wherever feasible, the visiting students were hosted by Rotarian families from different Rotary clubs of Guwahati and Shillong, to learn about the culture and customs of the region. For these students attending the colourful Durga pooja/Dussehra festivals was a fascinating experience and they learnt all about this important Hindu festival, which is celebrated in the Northeast region with great enthusiasm, faith and fervour. The students participated in the *pushpanjali* ritual to offer flowers to the deities and then enjoyed the *prasad* which was served to them, says Shobha.

A highlight of their visit to Assam was their short meeting with the Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Guwahati. "Of course, getting an appointment with the chief minister was very difficult, but our incoming DG Agarwal managed it, and the CM did spend some time talking to the students. He wanted to know about their countries, and showed a lot of interest in discussing football with the student from Brazil," says Priyama. "He was also keen to know from them their impressions of the Northeast region of India and what they thought about its people and culture." The Rotarians

explained to the CM the objectives of the RYE programme and also pinned the RYE badge on him. "The event was widely covered by the media and did a lot to boost Rotary's public image," adds Shobha.

Later, the students were also taken to the Raj Bhavan where they were hosted breakfast by the Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi and the students interacted with him on the various cultural aspects of the Northeast.

But their most exciting trips were to Majuli, "the world's largest river island which attracts tourists from all over the world, and is fondly called 'Assam's cultural capital'. Our visitors were thrilled to learn that Majuli is also a strong contender for a place in UNESCO's World Heritage sites. Mostly inhabited by tribals, the culture of Majuli is unique. Rotary Club of Jorhat hosted lunch for the students enroute to Majuli," said Priyama. RC Nagoan hosted them to their second meal in Majuli.

On this island the students were fascinated with the art of mask-making. "In the little time they had with the artists, they learnt the rudiments of making masks and bought a few to take home as memories," says Priyama.

She adds that for these youngsters, in the age group 16–19, "it was their first interaction with the tribals; they loved the island, enjoyed the food, our traditional dance dramas, such as the *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana*, and tried to learn how to make the masks."

She herself hosted two of the students and said it was a wonderful experience for her family. "They ate whatever we gave them happily. During the first few days I gave them our local breakfast, made with rice. Leo, who stayed with us, would come to the kitchens and showed a lot of interest in learning how to make some of these traditional dishes for breakfast. He was very inquisitive and eager to learn and asked so many questions. When vegetable vendors came, he would take so many pictures, ask questions about the vegetables, and watched with interest the bargaining which goes on," smiled Priyama.

The Kaziranga National Park was another fascinating experience for them, and they were most impressed by "this park's contribution in saving the Indian one-horned rhinoceros from the brink of extinction at the turn of the 20th century. They were delighted to visit a place which has the distinction of harbouring the single largest population of this species," says Shobha. A safari ride here where they sighted one-horned rhinos, apart from other

wildlife, was the high point of their visit to this beautiful park. They were fascinated by the beautiful cane products that are made locally and purchased quite a handful to carry back home.

In Meghalaya, at Shillong, a perfect holiday destination, the three Rotary clubs of Shillong jointly organised a cultural programme to welcome the foreign students. Here the young visitors participated in various cultural activities, dressed in colourful traditional costumes and performed folk dances with gusto.

A highlight of their visit to Meghalaya was a trip to Cherrapunji, famous for its pristine, untouched beauty, lush greenery, cascading waterfalls, trekking trails, fresh air, and the world-famous double decker living root bridges made from rubber trees. Also known as Sohra, this is a high-altitude town in Meghalaya, and is well-known for its heavy rainfall. Shobha adds that the RYE students loved watching the waterfalls in Meghalaya, visited the museum, local market and tasted the local food. “They wanted to know what ingredients were used for making the food!”

The students also visited the Tezpur University where they had an interactive session with the local students. Both Shobha and DGE Agarwal say that the RYE as a flagship programme of RI gives youngsters an amazing exposure to the outside world, an opportunity to know all about different regions and cultures. The visit of the RYE students to the Northeast caught the imagination of the media and “we got amazing coverage in so many newspapers,” says Agarwal.

The two YE chairs thanked their DGs Anil Parmar of RID 3131 and Kushanava Pabi, RID 3240, and PDGs Prabhat Kedia, Kalpana Khound, Debasish Das, Manas Chaudhuri, Sunil Saraf and several assistant governors and members from RCs Guwahati, Gauhati South, Guwahati West, Guwahati





Clockwise from top:
From R: DGE Nilesh Agarwal, incoming youth exchange chair (RID 3240) Priyama Goswami and RID 3131 youth exchange chair Shobha Nahar with the YE students at the Kaziranga National Park in Assam; YE students at a stadium to participate in the Dussehra celebrations in Guwahati; YE students with RID 3131 YE director Shobha Nahar (second from R); YE students with Rotaractors of RAC Dibrugarh. DGE Agarwal, PDG Kalpana Khound and Shobha are also seen; A variety of masks at a workshop in the Majuli island.



Luit, Guwahati Icon, Guwahati Metro, Guwahati Elite, Dispur, Guwahati Smart City, Guwahati City, Shillong, Shilong Heritage, Orchid City Shillong, Jorhat, Nagaon, Tezpur, Greater Tezpur, several Rotaract clubs and host families.

Summing up the visit of the students, Shobha adds that for the first three days in Guwahati all the visitors were hosted by Rotarians, and after that they were put up in a hotel.

“I deliberately chose the Dusserah festival period because in the Northeast this festival is celebrated differently from the rest of India. The youngsters enjoyed the incredible love, warmth and hospitality extended to them in both Assam and Meghalaya. They loved the place so much and have made so many friends that in the future they will come here directly... it is almost as though the region has become a second home to them.”

In her interaction with the students she has gathered that after their visit to the Northeast, as well as the stint in Pune, where they have come for a year, “they have realised that Indians are very loving and caring people. The Japanese girl Iraho Swai, from RI District 2790, has even picked up some Marathi words and learnt to sing a few Marathi songs.” Some others are also learning Marathi from a tutor specially hired for them.

So will these students join Rotary in the future, I ask Shobha. “Well, these students will now definitely have a better understanding of what Rotary is all about. Now it is up to the Rotarians in their respective countries to follow this up and motivate them to become Rotarians. We have certainly kindled their interest in Rotary.” Not only in Rotary but Indian food and culture as well. Vincent from Germany enjoyed *paav bhaaji* and *paani puri* so much, that he has decided to take the readymade mixes with him home to make a few batches there!

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

Chennai Rotaractors surprise RIPE McNally

Kiran Zehra

Two young students training at the Tamil Nadu Rubik's Cube Association in Chennai created a memorable surprise for RI President-Elect Gordon McNally during his visit to the city where he addressed Rotaractors from RID 3232. Likhitesh (7), and Jivithesh (8), spent two hours solving 567 Rubik's Cubes to craft a special gift for the RIPE. "We wanted to give him something he could never forget," said DRR Gowtham Raj. McNally met the Rotaractors at Ethiraj College and was amazed when he unveiled the 5 by 4 ft frame displaying his 2023–24 presidential theme, *Create Hope in the World*.

"I am overwhelmed," he said, expressing his gratitude to the two boys and the Chennai Rotaractors for "creating such a beautiful memory. This heart-warming gesture is a reminder of the impact that young people can have on anybody. You give open-heartedly with energy and enthusiasm." Talking about his theme he said "the goal of the theme is to inspire people to restore hope in the world and help it heal from conflicts. Our world needs hope more than it ever did before."

Chennai Rotaractors greeted McNally and his wife Heather with a traditional folk dance and a Bharatanatyam performance by the Rotaractors of RAC Ethiraj College. McNally joined the fun, dancing with the Rotaractors, and appreciated their efforts to add a cultural touch to his visit.

Right: RIPE Gordon McNally felicitating Likhitesh, and Jivithesh for creating a frame displaying the 2023–24 presidential theme using 567 Rubik's Cubes.



RIPE Gordon McNally, (to his left) RID AS Venkatesh, DG N Nandakumar, DRR Gowtham Raj with the incoming Rotaract clubs president and secretaries for the year 2022–23.

The surprises continued when McNally was gifted a picture that he had taken with the incoming Rotaract presidents and secretaries just moments before he took the stage to address the gathering. "You are fantastic. This is getting very interesting," he said excitedly.

The Rotaractors highlighted their year's achievements. McNally was "thoroughly impressed by your work and efforts to make a positive impact

in the community. You are one of the biggest Rotaract districts in the world in terms of size and action. As I stand here and look at you and the achievements you have made, I know that hope will be created."

When asked about the sustainability of Rotary as an organisation, McNally responded that "Rotaract is not just the future of Rotary, it's the now and here of Rotary. It is our present without a



RIPE McNally shows the audience a framed photo that he took with the incoming Rotaract presidents and secretaries. (From L) DG Nandakumar, DRR Gowtham Raj, Heather and RID Venkatesh are also in the picture.

Above: (From left) Sumedha Nandakumar, DRR Gowtham Raj, District Rotaract Secretary Kesikka Kumaraguru, RIPE McNally, Heather, Likhitesh, Jivithesh, DG Nandakumar along with Rotarians and Rotaractors after unveiling the frame.

doubt. With Rotaract, we will be able to complete another 118 years. Our hope is on you.”

The event concluded with various Rotaract clubs from the district felicitating RIPE McNally and Heather. RID AS Venkatesh and DG N Nandakumar were also present at the event. ■

Healing hands in action

Jaishree

Here is a Rotaract club whose members use their vocation to benefit the larger community.



Rotaractors of RAC Medicrew examining people at a medical camp under *Project Khayaal*.

RAC Medicrew, RID 3141, is a 3,000-member Rotaract e-club chartered in 2020 by RC Bombay Pier.

The club membership comprises students pursuing medical and paramedical courses from across the world. In addition to providing healthcare services to the community, the club's in-house services are aimed at personal development and enriching their minds with knowledge from various sources of the medical field.

"We have members from Ukraine, Belgium, China and Russia to name a few," says club president Megh Nagvekar. The club's administrative structure includes a Rotaract state director for each state pan-India. Under the state director is a regional director, followed by a college head who oversees the Rotaractors of the medical college.

During the pandemic the members volunteered to tackle Covid emergencies globally, he adds. "We worked round-the-clock to provide medical care during both the spells of the outbreak," he adds.

The administrative committee draws up service projects to be implemented by the club across the globe in consultation with the state and the regional heads.

Under *Project Khayaal*, mega general health screening camps were organised in various cities across the country. These camps addressed malnutrition and anaemia in children. Special camps, focussing on eye and oral health, were conducted in schools too. "We taught the children the right way to brush their teeth and use the dental floss." Recently an oral health camp was organised, in partnership with the Smile Train India, in five cities — Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Pune and Bengaluru — with special focus on dental care for children with cleft lip.

The Rotaractors, along with the Inner Wheel Club of Bhuj Wall City, organised a screening camp to detect colour blindness in school-children. Four out of 200 children



At a slum in Mumbai to create awareness about hepatitis B, and distribution of ORS to prevent dehydration.

were diagnosed with the disorder. A counselling programme was held for their parents to prepare the children for alternate career options that would not hamper with their disorder.

The club members, along with volunteers from other colleges, visited the slums of Matunga in Mumbai and educated around 150 families there about the spread, causes and vaccination against Hepatitis B. “Most slum

families confused hepatitis vaccine with the Covid vaccine. The awareness camp had a huge impact on them indeed,” smiles the club president.

A one-day vaccination programme was undertaken by the club to vaccinate stray dogs and cats. The project, done in collaboration with an NGO Pawshunger, vaccinated 100 animals.

Under *Project Polaris*, the Rotaractors undertook a massive awareness

campaign at the medical college hospitals in Mangaluru, Bengaluru, Pune, Mumbai, Thane, Ajmer, Rajkot and Gujarat to educate patients in antenatal and post-natal wards about the various government healthcare schemes such as the Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram, Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram, Universal Immunisation Programme, Mission Indradhanush and the Janani Suraksha Yojana. “We spoke to them about the resources and amenities provided by the government under each scheme,” he says.

Professional development

On the professional front, the club drew up a session to educate its vast members about medico-legal issues in clinical practice. “Doctors often deal with medical cases which may have serious legal implications. Members with knowledge of the subject created the content for the session. The event was conducted in medical colleges across various states,” says Nagvekar.

An expert talk on combatting sexual assault in the medical profession was held in the member colleges. The club recently organised a programme in 16 medical colleges across the



A buccal swab test being done for stem cell analysis.



Children with toothpastes and brushes after a dental check up.

country to raise awareness about how a doctor must approach a patient of sexual abuse and how to handle such a situation. It also involved teaching medical students their medico-legal duties on encountering such a victim.

Under *Project Manzil*, the Rotaractors were introduced to a lecture on opportunities available at the Johns Hopkins University, US, for doing their Masters programme. “The session gave us an insight into the world of hospital administration and its prospects abroad. We also learnt about the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School,” he says.

International exchanges are hosted online every month. “We’ve conducted exchanges with members from Brazil, Singapore, Philippines, Turkey, Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon. Around 10–12 delegates are selected to participate virtually in each exchange and they showcase their rich culture through videos, pictures and presentations,” he explains.

MBBS Life is one of the signature projects of the club. It is a zoom/YouTube live session for freshers to

provide them information on academic and non-academic aspects of MBBS. “The brand awareness this project creates for our club every year and the overall impact it creates for the participants are phenomenal. The number of members we add to our club in a single day because of this one project are greater than what we usually achieve in a whole month!” smiles the president.

Bioethics bootcamp

Having bioethical competence is an indispensable skill for every medical professional. It focuses on ethical issues related to health. “Not only will it help keep us on the right side of the law but it will also give us the assurance that we have made the right choice in moral dilemmas. With this bootcamp, we gave budding medical professionals an unforgettable introduction to bioethics,” he explains. The programme taught them how to deal with personal and professional differences; respect cultural differences and the variation in choice and belief that comes with them; and

how to build rapport with patients and co-workers to foster healthier relationships. “This event brought in 30-plus new members to our club,” adds Nagvekar. Podcasts are regularly uploaded online to update the audience with information and discussions about bioethics and some of the ethical dilemmas that a clinician might face.

A collaboration between RAC Medcrew, IIT Bombay and Datri, a stem cell donor registry, helped the Rotaractors globally to get insight about stem cell donation and transplant. They learnt about the therapy to treat stammering, thanks to the resource persons from The Indian Stammering Association, “who themselves have been stammerers and have worked on themselves tremendously to achieve this proficiency.”

Nagvekar is grateful for being a Rotaractor as “Rotary has given us all a wide, valuable platform to learn and serve. Our membership is preparing us to be the best in our profession as well as to being good citizens in the society.” ■

Starting a conversation on cancer

Team Rotary News

Hair donations can be a powerful tool for raising awareness about cancer and supporting cancer patients, and the Rotaractors of RAC Women's Christian College, Chennai, are proving just that. Recently, the club organised a hair donation drive on campus, in partnership with Naturals Beauty Salon, which provided professional stylists to cut the hair of donors.

The aim of the event was to collect hair to make wigs for cancer patients, and it was promoted extensively on campus and on social media. The inauguration of the event was held in December 2022, with Dimple Raj, an ovarian cancer survivor, serving as the keynote speaker.

A total of 220 donors participated in the drive. Donors were given a "Free Haircut Coupon" and a 20 per cent discount on services from Naturals Salon as a token of appreciation for their contribution.

The event garnered attention from several media outlets, including Jaya TV, Sun TV, Hindu, and Polimer News, who covered the drive. The collected hair was sent to the Cherian Foundation to make wigs for cancer patients in centers across Chennai.

Through events like these, "people are able to start conversations about cancer and its impact on patients, while also supporting those who are going through the difficult process of cancer treatment," says Charumitha S, the club president. ■

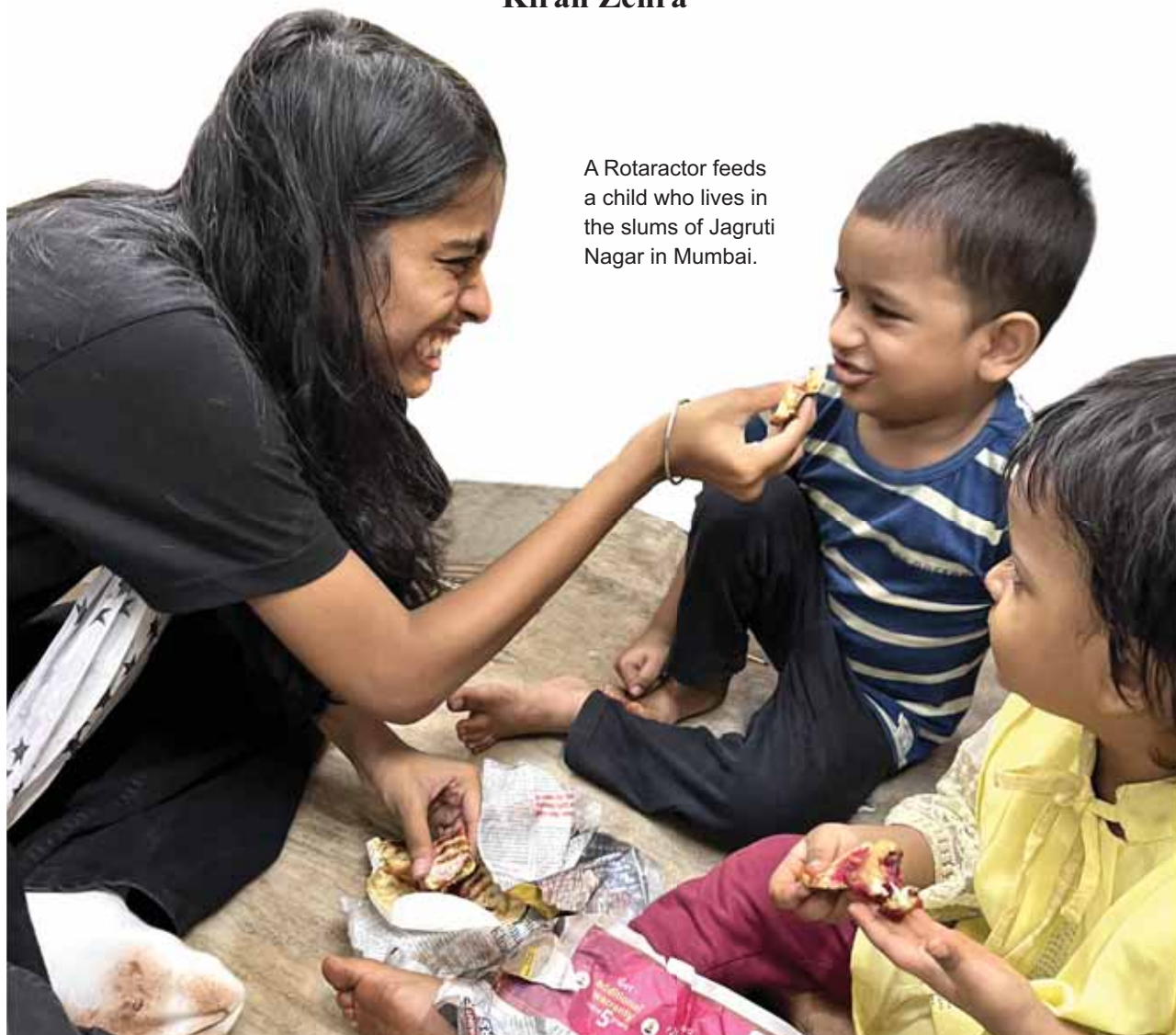


A stylist in action.



A Cinderella story for Mumbai children

Kiran Zehra



A Rotaractor feeds a child who lives in the slums of Jagruti Nagar in Mumbai.

Inspired by the story of Cinderella, who attended a ball and returned with a unique shoe made just for her, RAC Jai Hind College, RID 3141, invited underprivileged children living in the

slums of Jagruti Nagar in Mumbai to a party where they were given the chance to create colourful patterns on their new canvas shoes provided by the club. Along with providing new footwear “we wanted the children to feel special and unique,

just like Cinderella. The joy on their faces, as they painted their shoes, was heartwarming,” smiles Khushi Shetty, club president.

The club collaborated with Gully Classes Foundation, an NGO that is closely working to

develop this slum. “Once we had their shoe sizes, we zeroed down on stores that were selling the shoes at discounted price. We bought 37 pairs at ₹13,236 which was funded entirely by the club.”

The event was open to non-Rotaractors and



Clockwise from left:

Rotaractors discuss MHM topics with teenage girls living in the slums; Painting a shoe for a child as part of *Project Walk in Style*; Club members ready to perform a street play; Adolescent girls attend an MHM awareness session organised by the club.



the club collected a total of ₹2,100 as participation fee. “We used the collected funds for different projects we are carrying out in this slum,” says Khushi. The participants got to interact with the children, brainstorm to understand what kind of designs they wanted for their shoes and also help them paint.

The children were excited to unleash their creativity and “every pair had cartoon characters, flowers, starry night, and other themes painted on them. No two pairs looked the same,” smiles the club president. Once the painting was done the shoes were left to dry while the Rotaractors served the children snacks. The highlight of the event was the fashion show where the





A child walks the ramp in her newly designed shoes.

children walked the ramp flaunting their new shoes. The club invited the parents of these children to enjoy the show.

As a token of appreciation for the participants, the club made 'thank you' cards carrying the name and thumbprint of the child

they helped. This project was "a team-building charity programme that let us tap our inner artists while giving the less privileged children a one-of-a-kind experience," she says.

As part of their 'Silent Saturdays' initiative, the club carried out silent

acts of charity throughout the month of November. They created awareness on topics related to health, education, hunger and safety. Every week, they held street plays and donation drives to distribute different items like first aid boxes and hygiene kits, educational kits, tiffin boxes, water bottles, meals, sanitary napkins and blankets. "We distributed close to 250 blankets out of which 50 were sponsored by our parent club," says Khushi. Her club was successful in supporting and impacting more than 5,000 people living in the Jagruti Nagar slum, she adds. They have so far spent close to ₹70,000 for this project.

Talking about raising funds, she says that, "we ask our parents, go door-to-door in our apartment complex and circulate

fund requests on social media. We are able to raise decent amounts for our project. Plus, our parent club — RC Bombay — is always ready to help us."

In order to improve the infrastructure of the Dharamveer Sambaji Vidyalaya, a school for the underprivileged in Vikhroli, Mumbai, the club provided it with 50 tube lights and 28 ceiling fans.

The club also conducted a two-day sanitary pad donation drive under its 'I am for HER' project, which emphasised the importance of menstrual care, tracking monthly period cycle, and the use of sanitary napkins to teenage girls living in the slums. With the help of the Paddling Foundation, Mumbai, the club supported 250 women across Mumbai by donating over 4,500 sanitary napkins. ■



A child enjoying a sweet.

Medical care for villagers

V Muthukumaran

Reaching out to rural families with a medical camp under *Project Nalam*, “gave us immense satisfaction as the villagers don’t have access to modern health-care and are not aware of lifestyle diseases,” says M Dhanush, president, RAC Guindy, RID 3232. The four-year-old community-based club tied up with Imax Healthcare, a hospital owned by Rtn Prashanth Rajendran from RC Guindy, their parent Rotary, for the health check-up camp at Gudalur, Chengalpattu district, 50km from Chennai.

Two doctors supported by three nurses examined around 120 patients for BMI (body mass index), blood sugar, BP (hypertension) and other health issues. While

Dr Rakesh Vemparala is a Rotaractor, Dr Sneha is a consultant from Imax. “After consultations, medicines including antibiotics for one month were given to patients,” says Dhanush. Among the beneficiaries, five persons were found to have diabetes “and they were

unaware of this till they attended the camp.”

A half-day workshop on cybersecurity was held in December with club secretary Arunagiri, an IT engineer, giving a talk to 45 Rotaractors from across RID 3232. “We covered diverse topics such as phishing, data privacy,

social media hacking and wormhole. Following the interactive session, certificates were given to all participants,” he says.

Diwali was celebrated at CMS Children’s Home, an orphanage, with over 100 inmates under *Project Sparkles*. The club donated ceiling fans, mattresses, and sparsely-used clothes that were collected through a special drive. “We distributed 10 bags of crackers, biscuits and sweets to the children. Also, hygiene kits were donated to them.” An IT cloud engineer, Dhanush has been a Rotaractor for 10 years and “enjoys doing community service leading the 24-member Rotaract club. I have no plans to become a dual member. But at a later stage I will become a Rotarian to expand my community reach.” ■



Dr Sneha attends to a patient in *Project Nalam*.



Dr Rakesh Vemparala prescribes medicines for a patient.

Motivating young girls to combat low self-esteem

Rasheeda Bhagat



When “a 17-year-old smart, intelligent girl, with glowing ebony skin, lovely dark, long, curly hair, stands up and tells you that because of her dark complexion, she is shunned by her classmates and nobody wants to be her friend, it is nothing short of heartbreaking,” says Jayanthasri Balakrishnan, an eminent educationist

and motivational speaker on a wide variety of gender issues.

She has been the lead speaker in the flagship RI District 3212’s girls’ empowerment project titled *Yadhumanaval* (which in Tamil means ‘she is everything’), the brainchild of DG VR Muthu.

Under this project, along with project chairperson, K Vijayakumari, a member of RC Virudhunagar, she

holds talk — or rather ‘listening sessions’ as she’d have you believe — at high schools and colleges for both girls and boys, in predominantly rural areas of RID 3212.

Let’s return to Savitha (name changed), the “beautiful, talented, smart and intelligent 17-year-old girl from Sivakasi,” who stood up during the Q&A part of the session and expressed distress



over her self-esteem having hit a dismal low, due to her rejection by schoolmates just because of her dark complexion.

“When in reply I said that you are one of the most charming young persons with such a glowing complexion that I have ever met in my life, and asked her why do you measure yourself vis-à-vis somebody else’s parameters, it took her some time to even understand and digest what I was saying.” Jayanthasri, a former HoD of English Department at the PSG College in Coimbatore, adds that it looked as though this was the first time in her life that somebody was complimenting her about her looks or her complexion. “She couldn’t even recognise it as a compliment... there was a lingering doubt on her face as though I was teasing her. It took her some time to realise what I was saying and then she became very emotional, broke down and started crying.”

The girl was given some water and later composed herself, but the speaker is left musing “whether she accepted my compliment or not.”

This interlude that both Jayanthasri and Vijayakumari, who always accompanies her to high schools and colleges where these sessions are held, had experienced is a mirror to the kind of low esteem so many teenaged girls have





Educationist Jayanthasri Balakrishnan, the lead speaker in the *Yadhumanaval* programme, with school and college students.



in our communities vis-à-vis their physical appearance. Says Vijayakumari, a champion of gender rights herself: “Through this district project to empower girls, we are taking *Yadhumanaval* sessions to the doorsteps of rural girl children of Tamil Nadu, to help them come out of their cocoons with confidence and courage.”

She adds that Jayanthasri was chosen to address these sessions as she is a world-renowned motivational speaker who has the knack of making young people talk and inspires them to reach out for their dreams. “She engages with students to help them come out of their mind block, and as the sessions advance, the students start feeling a connection with her and open up to interact with her to get their long-standing doubts

clarified. Surprisingly, they ask her questions they would not ask even their own mothers! We believe that this psychological transformation of the girls is the first step to their freedom, growth and success in life.”

This project, which began in early 2022, even before Muthu became the governor, is sponsored by his own enterprise Idhayam Edible Oils as well as Arun Icecreams, and is held in high schools and colleges in interior South Tamil Nadu.

After conducting over 45 such interactive sessions with girls and boys, both the women realise that rural girls deal with huge problems such as anxiety and depression, an inferiority complex triggered

by the comments and abuse that are constantly hurled at them, and are battling with low self esteem. Jayanthasri firmly believes that boys have to be present when gender issues are discussed.

.I chat with both the women as they are returning from one of the sessions held in an interior area, and Jayanthasri explains that this session was on menstruation and MHM and “there were so many boys seated in the hall. They were seriously involved in the discussion and listening in rapt attention. There was no hooting or whistling as you normally find when there are videos or visuals of sanitary pads, with water being poured over them and so on. We have to sensitise men about the physical problems of women and how we need consideration and support from them.”

She makes it a point to be very factual and come straight to the point when discussing the issues and problems that young women face in our communities. “In our sessions there is neither romanticising or glamorising of gender issues... we talk



about these issues and problems in the most factual tone. We make it clear that women are not begging for pity or sympathy; all they need is understanding and empathy.” This inclusion of male students is very important, she adds, “so that when they grow up and start a family, they will not be half-baked men, but adult and mature human beings, ready to take on responsibility for their families.”

Quizzed on the most common issues/questions raised/asked by girl students from rural communities, Jayanthasri says these are mostly related to how to overcome inferiority complex. “Like most adolescent girls, they tend to be pretty uncertain about their physical appearance, which unfortunately is a very important aspect in their lives, thanks to the pressure put by the beauty care industry. We all know about that. Hence, the example of Savitha and her inability to deal with her dark

complexion, even though she had a beautiful glowing skin and colour.”

Another common question raised, she added, is on how to overcome stage fear. Most of these girls are afraid to speak up, even during chat sessions with their own teachers. So in many institutions when the girls open up and are eager to ask so many honest and unconventional questions, many teachers have marvelled at Jayanthasri being able to draw the girls out. “When it comes to questions on overcoming stage fear, I sometimes pretend I did not hear the question and ask the girl to come on stage and ask the question from the stage. When she does it, I tell them: ‘There you are; now you have spoken from the stage so you no longer need to get stage fright!’”

Other common questions are about how to deal with catcalls and eve teasing when the girls walk on roads or are in buses. At one place, fortunately, there were some women police personnel in the audience, and they told the girls that “all you have to do is complain to the principal, who will pass on your complaint

In our pseudo wisdom we think we know everything about these children but when we stand before them, and find that they ask such profound and mature questions, it can often make you feel totally redundant.

Jayanthasri Balakrishnan
Resource person



to us, and we will deal with such offenders.”

One aspect which becomes very clear after such dialogues with the young girls is that what they aspire for is very, very different from what their parents want from them. For example, a couple of girls told her that they were very interested in joining the defence forces but their parents are against this idea. “A Class 9 student asked me this question and wanted to know how she could convince her parents... mind you, they are not complaining about their parents... the word used was ‘convince’ them.” So unlike teenagers from well-to-do, urban areas, who can be defiant, the attitude of these girls is very different,” she says.

Both Vijayakumari and Jayanthasri point out that many girls are grappling with their parents’ desire to get them married, while they are interested in continuing their education and finding a job so that they

can be economically independent. “So many of them ask me what they should do. So I tell them... don’t throw tantrums or cry, or use pressure tactics like locking yourself in your room, or not taking your meals. Behave normally, and try to convince them... try to bring them around to your point of view that higher education is the best thing for you. Do it every day and with unfailing regularity and I assure you they will slowly understand that they have to support your dream and will do so,” says Jayanthasri. She reiterates that there should be no complaints, no hunger strike or pressure tactics... “look into their eyes and tell them that you know me since my birth, if you don’t understand and support what I want, who else will do so?”

Vijayakumari, herself the retired headmistress of a government-aided school, and past president of her club, adds that they also give the girls examples of many girls who continue their education after marriage with the support of their husbands and this is particularly true of research students. “So we tell them, that in case you have no choice but get married, try to get the support of your husbands and in-laws to continue your education.”

What about questions on love and romance, or sexuality, I ask Jayanthasri. “There are none,” she says firmly. “We have met over 60,000 adolescent girls through 45 meetings and we have not come across any child talking about romance, love, or anything to do with cinema-fed culture. When the talk is about their future, when you focus on something very positive, they themselves ask very serious and mature questions, which leave their teachers wondering why they never open out like this to them!”

She adds: “Today was our 45th session and I am realising again and again that all that these girls and boys need is a pair of ears and a heart to listen. Once

you are willing to listen to them; once you convince them that you are sincere and want to help them... believe, me they can feel your pulse in two minutes..., they open up and pour their hearts out to you. I am so thankful to Rotary for giving me this opportunity. In our pseudo wisdom we think we know everything about these children but when we stand before them, and find that they ask such profound and mature questions, it can often make you feel totally redundant. This has been such a learning, unlearning and relearning experience for me. If I can help even a few girls get out of their low esteem, it would mean a lot.”

Vijayakumari adds that the central objective of the chat sessions with the girls, aged 14 years and above, is to “convince them that rather than a challenge, life is a big opportunity. We strive to make these girls realise that failure is an essential part of life and build the courage to ask, ‘What next?’”

D G Muthu, whose brainchild is this project, says he got the idea of empowering girls from the great poet Bharatiyar’s poems. “In most places in India, particularly Tamil Nadu, men are always in the forefront, so I was searching for a project that would put the spotlight on girls, especially in rural areas, where girls and women desperately need our support. And I believe *Yadhumanaval* was the perfect answer.”

Perhaps, he adds, the fact that he himself has three granddaughters, must have also contributed to the project idea springing in his head. “Seeing its success, we would be very happy to partner with any Rotary club across Tamil Nadu to reach the benefits of this project across the entire state.”

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

Pune college Rotaractors spread goodwill

V Muthukumaran

With four Rotaract clubs at the Modern College of Engineering (MCOE), Pune, “there is a good deal of friendly competition among us to host interesting

events and programmes to attract students, and gain steady patronage,” says Anurag Jadhav, secretary, RAC ENT C MCOE. All their 21 members are from Electronics and Telecommunications (ENTC). “Ours is a seven-year-old

club, the first to be started in our college and only students from our branch can become members. Our annual membership dues is ₹800 per person — ₹400 each for the district and RI,” he says.

Rotaractors with a truck load of blankets ready for distribution.



To spread love and cheer in the society, they initiated *Project Groove Kindness*, a one-day act where Rotaractors approached strangers and handed them a kindness note with a flower and chocolate. “Two Rotaractors caught the attention of the public as they held ‘free hug’ posters to spread goodwill and joy. We engaged people in pleasant conversation and helped them shake off anxiety, stress and depression,” says Jadhav.

During the third edition of *Project Life of Giving*, their flagship event, “we donated 600 woollen and cotton blankets to three special



A beneficiary with a woollen blanket.



care homes — Savali, an orphanage; Shantibaab, an old age home; and Dnyangangotri Pratisthan, a school for physically-challenged — and homeless people including beggars, roadside families and slum dwellers.”

Programmes are conducted across all the six avenues of service including professional development of Rotaractors. “We made 43 eco-friendly Ganesh idols with Bombay clay in a workshop conducted by Rtr Esha Dashratha under *Project Kaladhipati* and took them home to celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi in August last year,” says Jadhav.

During the weekly meeting of their parent RC Pune Sinhgad Road, “I took up the issue of funding for the *Project Life of Giving*, and the Rotarians readily donated for the cause. This helped us to procure blankets

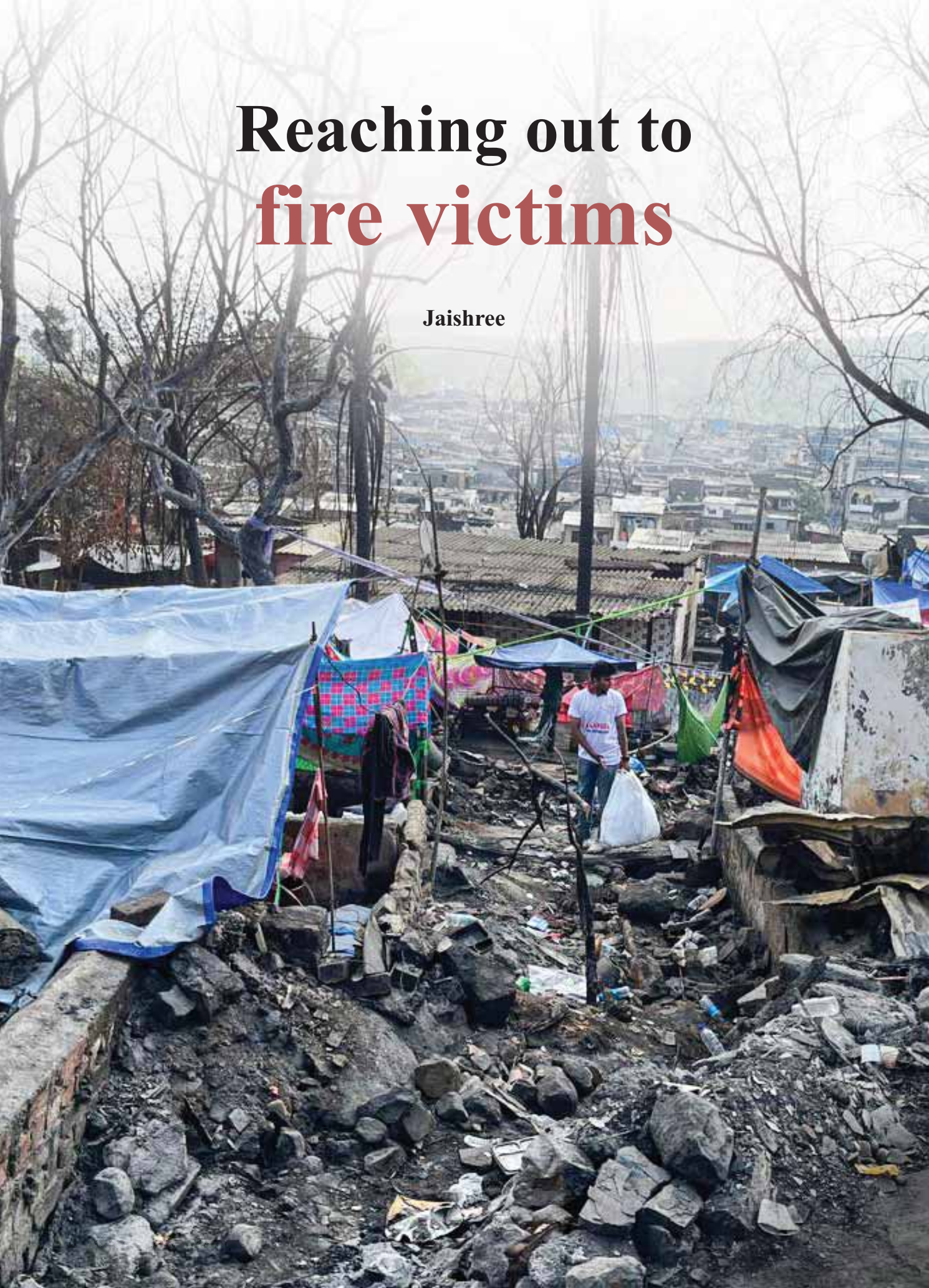
for distribution,” says club president Supriya Saudagar. Other Pune clubs too pitched in with their contributions for the Rotaract project.

Stargazing project

The club is planning a stargazing night where Rotaractors and students will observe planets and other celestial objects in the universe through telescope. “We have three organisations who are ready to partner with us and provide telescopes for holding the event. It will be open for all students,” says Jadhav. Looking forward, he says, “we have a plan to host an inter-club youth exchange programme for Rotaractors from other districts. And spadework is on to sketch out the event details and select the right club from other districts for our maiden foray.” ■

Reaching out to fire victims

Jaishree





A scene from the Malad slum that was gutted by fire.

A major fire broke out in the slums in Malad in the western suburbs of Mumbai on March 13 and nearly 2,000 people lost their belongings. Rotaractors of RAC Hinduja College, RID 3141, along with the Vrikshit Foundation and Aakansha Foundation, provided sleeping mats and groceries to the fire victims under project *Helping Hand*. “Together we distributed 450 sleeping mats and 60kg wheat. It created such an impact in us too and made us realise the power of working together for a common cause,” says Palin Rathor, president, RAC Hinduja College.

The club, along with its parent RC Bombay, organised a year-long initiative — *Periods of sharing* — through which it conducted a menstrual hygiene programme in three phases for 400 tribal and less privileged women in Jogeshwari and

Marol villages near Mumbai. The Rotaract volunteers teamed up with Rotarians to visit the villages and discussed with the women, issues related to menstruation, polycystic ovary disease, cramps, and painful periods. Sanitary pads to last for three months were distributed to 400 women. “We educated them on the hygiene benefits of using sanitary napkins as against the more rustic way of managing periods with ashes, hay or wood dust that they were used to. It hurt us to realise from our discussions with the village women that sanitary pads are a luxury and beyond their purchasing power. One of them even said that she would rather buy milk for her baby than spend on a sanitary pad packet,” says Palin.

Coinciding with World Mental Health Day (Oct 10), the club members organised a two-day initiative to support people suffering



A couple with a sleeping mat given to them by the Rotaractors.



Clockwise from top: Rotaractors with the tribal women after distributing sanitary pads to them; Rotaractors with the relief material ready for distribution to the fire victims; Rotaractors on an initiative to support people with mental health issues.

from mental health issues and spread positivity. Flash mobs, karaoke sessions were performed at strategic spots in the city. Other programmes such as meditation, and laughter therapy workshops formed part of the event. A campaign to promote body positivity organised by the club attracted good attention and feedback.

An awareness session on cyber crime was organised for college students and general public. Police personnel addressed the invitees on various frauds and digital

crime, quoting case studies, and gave tips as to how to be alert and not fall prey to such activities.

A clean-up campaign was initiated on the college campus with Rotaractors urging the students to participate in garbage collection in and around the college campus. Over 450kg of waste including papers, electronic and plastic materials were collected and handed over to the sanitation authorities for proper disposal.

The club teamed up with Uphaar, an NGO that works

One of the tribal women even said that she would rather buy milk for her baby than spend on a sanitary pad packet.

Palin Rathor

president, RAC Hinduja College

towards fighting hunger in underprivileged communities, and distributed breakfast to 200 people in a slum near the Lower Parel Railway Station. ■

Focus on service and membership in Bhopal

Team Rotary News



Above: Rotaractors at a membership development programme.

Below: A Rotaractor wraps a blanket around a street dweller.



Under the district project *Audarya*, which aims to provide warmth to the homeless during the winter season, RAC Technocrats Institute of Technology and Science, Bhopal, RID 3040, conducted a blanket donation drive across the city. The club distributed over 35 blankets to the underprivileged people living on the streets, at the railway station, and near traffic signals.

The club installed a new website, called *Umang*. The event was held on the college campus and was attended by members from various Rotaract clubs in Bhopal. The club also distributed certificates and appreciation notes to its board members and active members.

A membership development programme was held, where 30 new members were inducted. This initiative aimed to expand the club's reach and involve more young people in the club's social service activities. This was followed by a spiritual awareness programme held at ISKON for the newly added members.

Rotaractors celebrated Christmas with 40 visually-impaired children. The group danced, sang, and distributed gifts to the children, bringing a smile to their faces. They also visited Apna Ghar, an old age home. Club members engaged the inmates of the home in many fun activities and also encouraged them to dance along. Breakfast was served and members distributed gifts to the elderly. ■

Rotaract projects create positive vibes

V Muthukumaran

Despite resource and fund constraints, RAC MNM Jain Engineering College, RID 3232, is doing impactful projects that have received good feedback from the neighbourhood. In *Project Ramble* all the 150 Rotaractors took out an anti-drug awareness rally for around 1.5km from the college campus to Thoraipakkam signal junction, a

busy traffic hub, with banners and posters sensitising people against drug addiction.

Speaking about the rally, club president Azhagu Rajesh says, “at the traffic junction we divided into four teams and approached the commuters, pedestrians and motorists with a message, *Say No to Drugs*. Around 60 people were coaxed to take anti-drug pledge individually by our Rotaract teams.”

Project Freedom Carnival created a festival ambience for 1,500 disabled children and adults, who arrived at the college from different parts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. “The cultural fest offered them a platform to exhibit their talent in dance, music and other stage performances. We had put up over 10 game stalls that engaged them in fun activities,” says Rajesh. Buses were arranged to transport special children and disabled from their special homes to the venue. The major highlights of *Freedom Carnival* were the expert sessions which counselled the parents of the disabled on how to take care of them, taught simple yoga postures, and laughter therapy for children to keep them in good spirits.

Doing his fourth year, BE (Computer Science), Rajesh was an Interactor at Sri Sankara Vidyashram in his school days. “But as an Interactor, I could do only 2–3 events in a year as the scope was limited.





Rotaract teams at a traffic junction in *Project Ramble*.

Rotaractors take out an anti-drug awareness rally.



Project Freedom Carnival created a festival ambience for 1,500 disabled children and adults, who arrived at the college from different parts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. The cultural fest offered them a platform to exhibit their talent.

Now, after taking over as Rotaract club president, I have so far done 44 projects this year.”

Best Presentation Award

At the RID 3232’s Group Rotaract Meet held at Anna University, Chennai, in December, “I gave a presentation on the half-yearly projects of our club which bagged the Best Presentation Award at the event. This is in contrast to my school days, where due to stage fear I could not present my views boldly

to a large gathering, though I had lot of friends then.”

Recently, the club members had volunteered at *Project Aasan* in which their parent Rotary, RC Adyar, honoured 120 government school teachers with certificates and mementos. “We learnt a number of things including crowd management, logistics and other issues related to a Rotary event in this project.” Most of the service projects are being done with the help of college management and private sponsors. “Our projects are done on shoestring budgets as funding is a challenge. *Project Ramble* was sponsored by our college. While for *Freedom Carnival* our college provided food and the venue, the events and other fun games were sponsored by an NGO, along with a few private firms,” explains Rajesh.

After completing his engineering course, “I want to be a mentor to my club and like to remain a Rotaractor as long as possible. I am not thinking of becoming a Rotarian anytime soon,” he smiles. ■

You cannot go to a government school on the outskirts

of Mumbai and explain to children the benefits of an avocado or a salad made from exotic fruits or vegetables. Not only is it going to be irrelevant but boring too,” says Priyesh Butani, president, RAC Dahisar Coast, RID 3141. The club’s recent initiative is helping rural schoolchildren learn the importance of a healthy diet and acquaint them with the concept of nutrition and personal hygiene.

“Some of these children come from areas where access to clean water and three meals a day is itself a big question. To ensure that these sessions were relevant and resonate with the students, we took into consideration their difficulties and understood their cultural background before designing this programme.”

During one such nutrition programme, at the village school in Mallad, near Mumbai, almost every student raised their hand when they were asked if they liked instant noodles. Why do they like noodles? “A small pack of noodles cost ₹10 or less, it can be made quickly and requires

very little effort, and it tastes different they replied. But when we asked to tell us the ingredients that went into making it nobody

knew the answer,” says Butani, and adds that the programme helped create awareness about chemicals in food and the risks involved in consuming food with preservatives. “We also explained what a healthy diet should include,” he adds.

On World Braille Day the members of the club hosted a radio show to discuss the history of

the braille system and different technologies available for reading and writing in Braille, and how it can empower the visually-impaired.

Under *Project Shines and Smiles*, Rotaractors visited Pragati Andh Vidyalaya, Badlapur, and interacted with the students and conducted a yoga demonstration and good touch, bad touch

Lessons in nutrition for rural children

Kiran Zehra



A craft session for village school students in Mallad near Mumbai.

The club took into consideration the children’s difficulties and cultural background before designing the nutrition and personal hygiene programme.

awareness session. Butani and his team donated Braille blocks, speakers and chocolates to this school that houses over 50 visually-impaired students.

Through *Project Paws for Cause*, the club is feeding stray dogs. “Our

streets are full of dogs and people usually complain about being chased or growled at. That is primarily because the street dogs are hungry. When strays are fed, they become less aggressive toward humans and other animals

and feel more secure in their environment,” says the president. The club has been feeding over 30 dogs consistently with pedigree and branded dog food “that is good for their health.”

The club co-hosted a DEI talk show focusing

on the problems faced by the LGBTQ community along with RCs Mumbai Dahisar, Mumbai 101, Mumbai National Park, Vasai and Inner Wheel Club of Mumbai Dahisar. A clothes distribution drive was carried out at Akaoli village, near Palghar. Over 250 villagers benefitted from the initiative. Members visited an old age home in Mumbai, spent time with the inmates and donated rice, wheat flour, different lentils, millets and digestive biscuits.

With an aim to create awareness on best hygiene practices and facilities that help women and girls living in slums manage their menstruation in a proper way, the club is conducting MHM awareness drives. Butani says that “in slum areas of Mumbai, MHM awareness is crucial as many women and girls lack access to proper sanitation facilities, information, and products to manage their periods.” Multipacks of sanitary napkins were distributed to 350 underprivileged women and girls.

At a recent member-only dance night, the Rotaractors “dressed up in bright coloured traditional outfits for a Garba dance. “Hosting this dance night was a fun team-building exercise. It was a way to unite our club members and provide a social activity they will remember forever,” smiles Butani. ■



Clockwise from top: Spending time with inmates of an old age home; Rotaractors donating a water bottle to student at Pragati Andh Vidyalaya, Badlapur; Rotaractors feeding a dog as part of the club's *Project Paws for Cause*; A student displays his artwork; Rotaractors at a sanitary napkin distribution drive.

Engaging Rotary clubs to expand Rotaract

V Muthukumaran

Focus on increasing Rotaract membership and talk to Rotary clubs so that they come forward to sponsor new Rotaract clubs in their neighbourhood, said DG Anil Agarwal at the two-day (Feb 25-26) Rotaract district conference, *Adithya*, of RID 3120 in Varanasi. “Some clubs are unable to pay the mandatory RI dues which have come into force after #Elevate Rotaract policy was adopted by Rotary,” he said.

At present, there are 600-plus Rotaractors in 35 clubs in the district, after 30 inactive clubs were terminated following the RI directive. There is a huge opportunity to form institution-based clubs as “we can attract college-going youth in large numbers into the Rotaract fold,” said Agarwal. Hence, he urged, DRR Sachin Upadhyay to open a “channel of discussion with those Rotary clubs who have not yet sponsored a Rotaract club with the help of district Rotaract



RC Mirzapur Gaurav secretary Sandeep Goyal felicitates RAC Allahabad East president Garima Singh in the presence of district Rotaract chair Nilesh Bhuwalka (centre) and DRR Sachin Upadhyay.





DG Anil Agarwal, district blood donation chairman Ajay Saxena and Rotaract chairman Bhuwalka with Rotaractors at the launch of *Mahadan 8.0* website and anthem.

chair PDRR Nilesh Bhuwalka.” DG Agarwal has set a target of 1,000 Rotaractors by June 30 this year.

A website for *Mahadan 8.0*, the multidistrict blood donation camp, and its anthem were launched at the discon. DRR-elect Harsh Srivastava unveiled the district theme — *Serve with Joy* — for next year (2023–24). Another interesting session was a panel discussion among PDRRs in which they shared ideas and experiences to take Rotaract forward in RID 3120. Two new clubs, RACs Banaras and Varanasi Kabir, were installed and “their club forms duly filled in were sent to RISAO, Delhi, for charter certificates,” said DRR Upadhyay.

The Rotaract clubs gave presentations on their project activities, and “for some of the Rotaractors who are attending the discon for the first time, it was a great learning experience. They expressed a desire to take

part in the multidistrict Rotaract and Rotary events to widen their contact and friendship network,” he said.

Interesting sessions on personality development, membership and ‘Rotaract beyond designations’ had Rotaractors and experts giving stimulating talks, followed by interactions. Around 150 delegates including 30 Rotarians were present at the discon. Bhuwalka was the guest of honour.

Mahadan 8.0

During World Rotaract Week (March 13–19), all the Rotaract clubs organised around 40 blood donation camps and collected 2,000 units of blood. “We donated the blood to government hospitals and blood banks. It was a huge success,” said Upadhyay. He had instructed the clubs to reach out to underprivileged children under *Project Smile*, a district priority event. “We donated stationery items, took the

children to a movie, and distributed food packets, thus benefitting over 700 children in all.”

On achieving the membership target (1,000 Rotaractors), he said, “we are trying our best to reach the target set by our DG Agarwal. We have spoken to some Rotary clubs who are interesting in chartering Rotaract clubs.”

Having been a Rotaractor for five years, Upadhyay, a teacher and partner in running a coaching institute for competitive exams, said, “Rotaract is a kind of self-development platform.” He became a dual member after joining RC Prayagraj Sangam in July 2022. On his long-term plans, “Rotary is a service organisation and also enables one to make new connections. I will strive to make the society around me a better to place live by working as full-time Rotarian in the coming years.” ■

Rotaract care for cancer patients

Kiran Zehra

Have you ever met the mother of a 10-year-old child who is battling cancer? asks Archie Chhadwa, president of RAC Mulund South, RID 3141. Recently her club members visited the Access Life Assistance Foundation to spend time with young, underprivileged cancer patients and their mothers. As the primary caretaker “she has to be present full

time for her sick child and also keep the family together, strengthening and nourishing it. Add to this the family’s poor economic background.”

Recalling her interaction with the mothers, she says “They weren’t crying or looking for sympathy. All they needed was a little break.” One of the mothers at the Foundation says, “I was shocked to know that my son has cancer, he is hardly 10. My whole world

fell apart. I am afraid of losing my child and cannot sleep during the nights. I simply look at him and cry. But the next morning I assure him that everything will be all right.”

Archie and her team planned a fun day for both the patients and their mothers and engaged them in games and craft activities. The highlight of the day was that the children and mothers participated in a creative session

where they could express themselves through art. “I suffer looking at my child suffer. Forget about meeting relatives and friends, I hardly talk to anyone even over the phone. This activity helped me relax a little and I saw my baby smile after a very long time,” says Shabana (name changed), mother of a six-year-old cancer patient.

Another mother says “it may not look like a perfect piece of art but this painting is priceless. *Isse mein hamesha apne pass rakhungi* (I will keep it with me forever).” The Rotaractors gifted the patients stationery, fruits and dry fruits.

Through its *Project Muskaan*, RAC Mumbai Mulund South partnered with Cope with Cancer

Rotaractors with the paediatric cancer patients at the Access Life Foundation in Mumbai.





A child displays his artwork.

for an awareness campaign to encourage people to donate their hair to make wigs for cancer patients who have lost their hair due to chemotherapy. The campaign offered valuable information on where to donate hair, and guidelines for hair donation.

Milk for the poor

The club completed the 10th edition of its annual 'The White Revolution' campaign, which encourages people to donate milk instead of offering it to the Shivling. The donated milk is then checked for quality, processed and donated to less privileged communities, while some of the milk is kept aside to feed stray animals. The campaign raised awareness through social media promotion, celebrity PR, pamphlet distribution and street plays. "Our club collected 200 litres of milk at the beginning of the year, including 80 litres of

Rotaractors with the four domestic helpers who were honoured on Woman's Day.



flavoured milk. We gave it to Nirmal Jyot Foundation, a Mumbai-based NGO, and to construction workers. Another 120 litres of milk was distributed to underprivileged communities. Five litres of diluted milk was poured out in bowls and kept on roadsides for strays in Mulund,” says Archie. This year the club has so far collected and distributed over 539 litres of milk.

Honouring women

The Rotary and Rotaract Club of Mumbai Mulund South, along



A Rotaractor at the milk processing facility.



A Rotaractor pours a glass of milk for an underprivileged child.

with Navpravah Foundation, celebrated International Women’s Day by honouring four women domestic helpers who regularly support women in their community by collecting funds for them to buy their children school bags, books, or even pay their fees. The awardees, Anita Satam, Sunita Ingale, Kamal Sutar, Pooja Gaykar and Sadhana Pawar, spoke about how they themselves belong to low-income background but were able to understand that it was important for their community to grow together. “It is a valuable lesson for us to learn,” says the club president. Rotaractors also appreciated the efforts of over 30 women vendors at the Mulund market by serving them lime soda and water to beat the heat. ■

Interactors shape a school's vision

V Muthukumaran

Out of over three decades of pursuing academic excellence at the Sri Kamakshi Vidyalaya Matric Higher Secondary School in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, over 25 years, this Interact club has enriched students with extra-curricular activities and all the noble ideals of Rotary, as it celebrates its silver jubilee this year. Run by the Kamakshi Seva Trust, one of the charitable arms of the SPIC Group of companies, the school “is creating a database of Interactors joining Rotary after their Rotaract stints in college, as this will strengthen our umbilical cord,” says C Arunachalam, school secretary and member of RC SPIC Nagar, RID 3212, which has sponsored the Interact club.

The main aim of the Interact club, chartered in 1996, was to inculcate a service attitude in students. “This will extend a platform for the young minds to join Rotary in the future,” says the

Rotarian, recalling his experience as a GSE member to Oregon, US, that transformed his life in 1997. “Excluding the Covid break, our Interact club has been very active on our campus, having taken up WinS projects, a smart class, mini libraries in classes and providing crucial support to Rotary’s field activities and programmes,” says G Meenakumari, the school principal and Interact coordinator. Only students from Classes 9–12 are allowed to join the club which has 27 Interactors who make their presence felt in Rotary projects such as the PolioPlus campaign and during governor’s visit to RC SPIC Nagar.

Annual project fund

Every year, their parent Rotary gives a corpus of ₹15,000–20,000 to the Interact club to kickstart its activities. “Apart from our monetary help, the Interactors are supported by the Kamakshi Seva Trust with its chief

P Muthukumar taking keen interest in them. Whether it is installing a sanitary pad incinerator at the school, holding a district *Project Vignana Ratham* (science chariot) or the *Save the Girl Child* programmes, our Interactors are critical to our success,” says Arun Jeyakumar, president, RC SPIC Nagar.

Recently, they installed mini libraries called *Books Bouquets* in each class where the book shelves are rotated across the sections of all the three blocks once the students have read them. “Interactors are also helping us to provide vocational skills to adults. On Diwali eve, sparsely used clothes were ironed, packaged and donated to Anbu Ullangal, an old age home with 180 inmates. Around 10 girl Interactors visited Arumugasamy Anbu Ashram, a shelter home for abandoned girl children below 18 years and spent the day with 55 inmates,” recalls Jeyakumar. Last year, Interactors fixed bull’s eye on heavy vehicles and, along with Rotarians, gave helmets to 10 two-wheeler riders as part of road safety awareness campaign.

Interact Club president Aashiv Muthusuthan, Class 12, aspires to study Electrical and Electronics Engineering, plus a major in Computer Science. With 700 students and state-of-the-art facilities including smart class, computer lab, RO water units and gender-segregated toilets, “the school owes a lot to its Interactors who are our visible interface with the public and the community,” smiles the principal. Industrialist AC Muthiah, founder, SPIC Group, is the patron of the school. ■

Interact club president Aashiv Muthusuthan gives dress material to RC SPIC Nagar president Arun Jeyakumar (3rd from L) in the presence of DG V R Muthu (centre) and school principal G Meenakumari (left) to be delivered to a special home.



Bringing joy to communities

Jaishree

The members of Rotaract Club of Vindhyachal, RID 3120, are on a food distribution drive since October last year. Cooked food packets are distributed to slum residents and pavement dwellers in Mirzapur in UP. “We undertake this service activity every Sunday. We assemble in a common place and then fan out in groups of two or three. We buy food packets for distribution from various roadside restaurants and mobile eateries,” says club secretary Niyati Agarwal.

The Rotaractors also visit the district hospital to serve food to the patients and their caretakers, and distribute food to people at railway stations, temple entrances and bus stands.

Another project “close to our heart is our monthly visits to an

old age home on the outskirts of Mirzapur,” she says. The Rotaractors entertain the 30 elderly residents there during the visit to the home and provide them footwear, socks, blankets and clothes. “We check with them what they need before we go and plan our purchases. We have also got a water heater, mixer grinder and an air cooler for the home.” The Rotaractors mandatorily celebrate their special days such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries with a visit to the home and treating the inmates to a sumptuous feast.

Birthdays and special occasions are celebrated with slum children too. “It could be a movie show or a day at a gaming zone. But our special days are made extra special and soul satisfying when we are with



Clockwise from top: Rotaractors with children outside a gaming zone; A Rotaractor provides food to a patient and his caretakers at a hospital; Rotaractors with blankets ready for distribution; Children enjoying a 3D movie at a theatre; Clothes distribution at a slum.





these children. For them too it is a special day because they get to visit a theatre or a mall only when we take them there,” says Niyati.

It is the club’s tradition every year, just before the winter sets in, to organise a clothes collection and donation drive. The members spread the message among their friends and relatives to donate their sparingly used clothes which are systematically collected and sorted according to age and gender. Worn out or torn clothes are discarded and the good ones are cleaned and neatly packed. “We then take it to the slums for distribution. The entire project is like a mela for a week and everyone pitches in with all that they can,” smiles Niyati.

The club has 45 members and it is well supported by the parent club, RC Vindhyachal. The members, who are mostly employed or are entrepreneurs, contribute liberally for all service projects the club undertakes. ■



Khel Utsav spreads cheer in Mumbai

V Muthukumaran

A seven-year-old *Khel Utsav* (sports festival), the flagship project of RAC SIES College, Sion (W),

RID 3141, is reaching out to more than a dozen categories of people across age groups and different sections of society by organising sports and fun games creating strong bonds of friendship. “We have an organising committee of 50 Rotaractors led by project chair Smruti Tawde which plans every sports meet for different sections of people, takes care of logistics and other minute details of the events,” says Tirtha Kale, club president.

The venue and timings for each sports day — for the disabled, underprivileged children, school students from Classes 1–10, cancer patients et al — differ and they are chosen with great care and planning. “*Khel Utsav* events are conducted over four months, and this year we are having it from Feb to May at different venues. We are planning to add three more categories and hold an event at Jamshed village, Palghar, adopted by our district Rotaract, for the villagers to participate in various sports and games,” she explains.

So far this year, in the seventh edition, a two-day

sports meet was conducted for 1,500 school students at the college playground; one for underprivileged children; and 250 cancer patients took part in the *Khel Utsav* at the Ashok Singhal Cancer Care Centre. “We collaborated with Club Mahindra Holidays, the sponsor for the event, at the cancer centre in Sion (W) and donated 70 blankets and over 100 bedsheets for the inmates,” she says. While monitoring the progress of ongoing sports activities, Tirtha is also working out means to further expand *Khel Utsav* to three more categories to include leprosy patients, Interact schools and ragpickers.

Two-day symposium

It was an occasion for healthy interaction on topical subjects at the two-day GSPS — Global Socio-Political Symposium — in which around 130 students including Rotaractors and college faculty were present to listen to experts on climate change, fake news and youth politics.

Mission Green Mumbai founder Subhajit Mukherjee (climate change), Vote ki Awaaz founder Utkarsh Mishra (youth in politics), and a panellist Dharmesh Barai gave presentations and interacted with the students. A new event *Prochodayan* (enlightenment) initiated by project chair Diya Furia is focused on mental health issues and development of inner well-being. “We have had five healing therapy sessions in partnership with Mera Mann Foundation. Four resource persons from the Foundation spoke and guided



RAC SIES College, Sion (W) president Tirtha Kale with a child at *Khel Utsav*.

the two-day workshop. On the first day, 80 school students took part, and on the second day, 120 college students including Rotaractors were present,” says Tirtha. Also, a dance therapy was conducted by Alisha Pinto for school and college students for two days. “*Prochodayan* events will be open to the public too from next year as the aim is to promote mental wellness through conscious changes in lifestyle.” Tirtha is planning with her team to hold a therapy session at Jamshed village “for which we are going to start work soon.”

Support from parent Rotary

For the conduct of *Khel Utsav*, the parent Rotary, RC Bombay Pier, provides resources and “gives us funds, if required. They also help us with contact details of sponsors for holding different sports meets,” says Tirtha. With over 200-plus members, the 13-year-old club collects ₹950 per head as membership fee before the start of Rotary year. “While ₹450 goes to RI’s mandatory dues and ₹100 to the district fund, the balance



Club president Tirtha Kale with Rotaractors at the prize distribution.

₹400 collected from each Rotaractor will be spent for our projects and events,” she explains.

Doing her final year BA in Multimedia and Mass Communication, Tirtha wants to be in Rotaract as long as possible, “if possible, as dual member. Over the last three years, Rotaract has taught me a lot. But I want to be a Rotarian too after

sometime.” She took part in the RID 3141’s disco titled *Polaris-Reimagining the Future* and “this event gave me a good exposure to the Rotary world.” Thanking her parent Rotary, Tirtha adds, “they have been extremely supportive of our projects and activities. Also, they motivate us to do something valuable for the community.” ■

A sports event for children.



Service projects galore in RID 3203

Kiran Zehra

Rotaract clubs in RID 3203 have been making a positive impact in their communities through various service projects. RACs NGM College, Pollachi Green Paradise, and a few other clubs from the district, in collaboration with Rotaract South Asia MDIO, have recently initiated *Project Bloom*. This health and lifestyle programme, says Dharanidharan A, District Rotaract secretary, “aims to empower women across the district with a positive lifestyle characterised by self-confidence, a clear personal identity, and the motivation to handle peer pressure to help them rise beyond economic and social limitations.”

As part of the project, Rotaract clubs plan to donate 20,000 sanitary napkins to women from poor economic

background. This project has gained support from over 25 Rotary districts and many clubs from RID 3203 “who have expressed their interest in collaborating. Clubs can donate these sanitary napkins to schools, colleges, and other areas where women cannot afford to buy napkins,” he says, and adds that the MHM awareness programme will help them understand and manage their periods with ease.

RAC Velalar College of Engineering and Technology in partnership with the Aravind Eye Hospital in Coimbatore recently organised their 6th mega eye camp. The camp was at Bharathi Kalvi Nilayam in Nasiyanoor, near Salem. More than 250 eye check-ups were conducted, and over 30 people had undergone free eye surgery. The selected individuals were taken from Nasiyanoor to the Aravind

Eye Hospital, where they underwent surgery and were provided with free accommodation for three days before returning home.

RAC Sakthi Institute of Information and Management Studies (SIIMS) celebrated and recognised the achievements of women in their community. They organised an award function named *Maathar*, which means women in Tamil, on Women’s Day. The ceremony recognised women in various fields including doctors, lawyers, farmers, teachers, police, auditors, politicians, athletes and social activists.

During the award ceremony, awardees shared their experiences with the gathering of 200 Rotaractors. They discussed the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment, highlighting the benefits that arise when women are





Above: Members of RAC SIIMS along with the awardees at *Maathar* event.

Right: DG B Elangkumaran along with Rotarians from RID 3203 and members of RACs NGM College, Pollachi Green Paradise, release the poster for *Project Bloom*.



Members of RAC Velalar College of Engineering and Technology, along with the doctors and staff of Aravind Eye Hospital, Coimbatore, at Nasiyanoor, near Salem.

given the opportunity to reach their full potential. “The ceremony served as a reminder of the need to continue working towards a world where gender is not a constraint, and every woman can fulfill her potential,” says Rithika Damodaran, club president. ■



Hair donation to help cancer patients

V Muthukumaran

It was heartwarming to see college girls seated in rows holding up their shining locks of hair they have donated to The Cherian Foundation to make wigs for cancer patients during *Project Eternal Eight 2.0* at the A M Jain College, Chennai.

A mega Rotaract project jointly organised by nine clubs led by RAC Blue Whales, RID 3232; three non-Rotaract entities including CSR Club of Ethiraj College for Women and GSS Jain College for Women, with the

support of Naturals group of salons, the hair donation drive was covered widely in the local dailies and TV channels driving home the message the Rotaractors are striving to spread.

While the first edition of *Eternal Eight* during the Covid times in 2019 evoked partial response due to pandemic restrictions, “this time we had 700 Rotaractors, besides some public volunteers, donating hair to help cancer patients live with dignity,” says IPDRR G Kamuvél, charter president and mentor, RAC Blue

Whales. “We are pleased with the response and feedback we got for the project, the aim of which is to provide ‘eternal’ joy to cancer patients with the ‘eight’ inches of hair being donated by each participant,” he explains. “Thanks to Rotaractors, the hair donation event has entered into the Virtue Book of World Records.” All the Rotaract clubs pooled in around ₹1 lakh for the second phase of hair donation which was presided over by Rtn Vinod Saraogi from RC Madras Central as chief guest.

Flagship programmes

With 38 members from diverse professions and social backgrounds, the 10-year-old community-based club has two flagship programmes reaching out to orphanages and special care homes. *Project Kondattam* (celebrations) is a mega day-out for around 550–600 children from 5–6 orphanages in and around

Rotaractors with their locks at *Project Eternal Eight 2.0*, a hair donation drive, at the AM Jain College, Chennai.





RAC Blue Whales mentor G Kamuvél (3rd from right) receives the Virtue Book of World Records certificate at the end of the hair donation campaign. AM Jain College dean M Ramya is on the left.

Chennai who gather at a city/college auditorium for a range of cultural programmes. “We provide them with delicious food, snacks and refreshments in the course of entertainment shows. For *Kondattam*, we bank on sponsors like Ashok

Leyland and EIPP Solutions who liberally donate for the event that cheer up less privileged children,” says Kamuvél.

Another initiative, *Project Porattam* (struggle) is a monthly activity wherein Blue Whale Rotaractors use their family ration cards to procure rice, pulses and other groceries, pack them in carton boxes and cloth bags, and deliver them to orphanages and roadside families. “Every month around 900–1,000kg of groceries including rice and other daily essentials are donated to children’s homes and homeless families.”

The club members pay the annual membership dues of ₹1,500 in two equal instalments. “After the new mandatory RI dues, we now pay around ₹740 per head as international dues, and use the balance for club activities,” says Kamuvél.

The club members meet twice or thrice a month to review ongoing projects and chalk out new programmes and events. “We have to raise our membership to 50 before June 30, the end of Rotary year, so that we have more hands, and ideas to take up diverse programmes,” says Maneesh Jain, club president. Their parent, RC Madras Esplanade,

provides mentorship and motivates them to take up diverse projects.

A career break

Looking back over his 13-year stint as Rotaractor, Kamuvél recalls he joined the Rotaract club at Shree Chandraprabhu Jain College, Minjur, located on the city suburbs as a student of BCom. One of his memorable experiences was that as charter president of RAC Blue Whales, he led a Rotaract team to set up a village library at Annai Sivagami Nagar, a hamlet at Thiruvallur district near Chennai.

In the course of installing the village library, “I came in contact with village panchayat president V Veeramuthu who was a government contractor. He influenced me to take up government contracts as a business and now I am into executing contracts for thermal power stations,” says Kamuvél. “Thus, being in Rotaract and doing impactful projects shaped my career too.”

While he is keen to become a Rotarian next year, “I am yet to decide on the Rotary club. However, I want to be in the thick of action doing community projects and as a member of project team for impactful events,” he smiles. ■



Villagers in Palghar district of Maharashtra look forward to *Project Handful of Grains*, a 12-year-old legacy event of RAC NM College, RID 3141, that distributes food grains to rural families in December each year. This year Rotaractors distributed grocery kits to three villages — Kukde, Bhagat Pada and Makadchola — reaching out to 150-plus families.

Each year weeks before the distribution camps, “we send PR messages through WhatsApp, Instagram and other social media

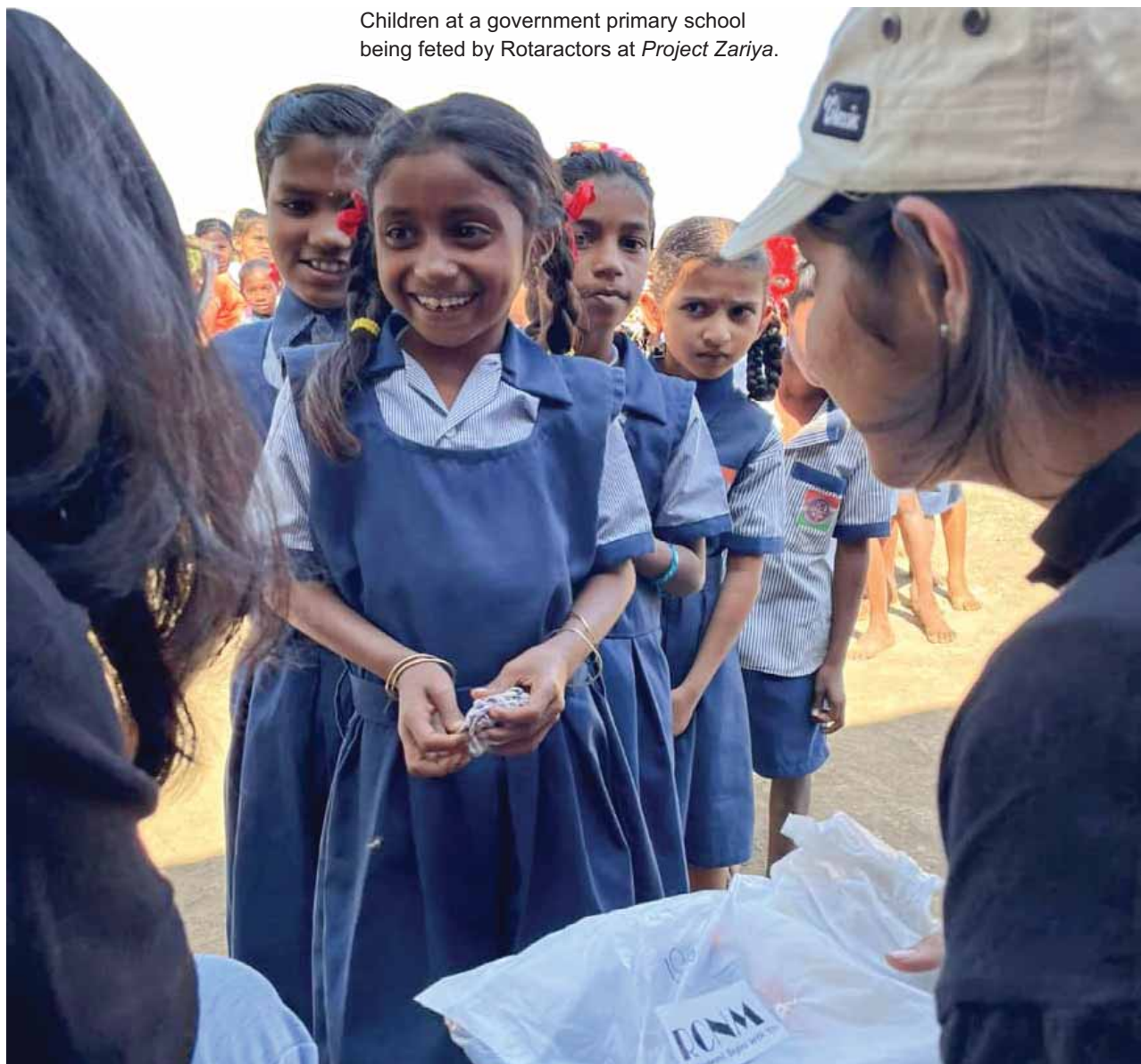
Project Handful of Grains keeps villagers happy

V Muthukumaran

handles to collect donations in the form of either grains or cash. We also contact our friends, families and relatives to mobilise resources for *Project Handful of Grains*,”

says Jhanavi Diora, club secretary and president-elect. This year from Nov to Dec, the club had mobilised over 3,000kg of grains including rice, dal and wheat, and received

Children at a government primary school being feted by Rotaractors at *Project Zariya*.



over ₹1 lakh as cash donations. “We had approached Wipro, the IT giant, and other small enterprises and startups for collecting funds,” she says.

After collecting the grains, the Rotaractors packed them and went to three villages for distribution, like they do each year. “We can confidently say that 600-plus families would have received our grain bags in the last 12 years across Palghar district.” Last year, they donated sports equipment worth over ₹1 lakh to a government primary school at Jamshed, an adopted village by Rotaract District 3141, under *Project Zariya* (means to success). “We levelled the school playground which was uneven with wild bushes so that students can play and enjoy their time in the school.”

Children from orphanages, underprivileged families and special care homes are taught basic English, Vedic Maths, soft skills and ways to acquire communication

and public speaking skills by a team of Rotaractors under *Project Enlighten*, a year-long programme. “We have partnered with NGOs like Salaam Balak and Aamcha Ghar to teach elementary skills to children for whom going to school is a luxury. Over 30 Rotaractors

are involved in *Project Enlighten* that holds informal classes to less privileged children.”

The second year BCom student, Jhanavi who has been in Rotaract for four years wants to “continue her work as Rotaractor as long possible. But I am game to join a Rotary club to further expand my community work, so dual membership is a good opportunity.”

Expressing her gung-ho attitude, club’s community service director Lakshita Tawade says, “I am passionate about my club projects — be it *Project Enlighten*, *Zariya* or *Parivartan* which provides essential garments based on seasons to homeless and indigent families.” Raincoats are given during rains, blankets in winter, caps to homeless people and stray dogs are fed under *Parivartan*.

With 642 members, the 25-year-old club at Narsee Monjee College of Commerce and Economics, Vile Parle in Mumbai, collects annual dues, a part of which is spent on t-shirts, diaries and lapel pins for Rotaractors to promote fellowship. A percentage of membership dues is set aside for district fund. The club is sponsored by RC Bombay West. ■



Rotaractors at *Project Handful of Grains*.



Packed food grains being donated to villagers under *Project Handful of Grains*.

Making laddus for children

Jaishree



Rotaractors of RAC Thane North make sesame seed laddus with Anjali Keluskar, grandmother of the club's VP Shrivani Tapre, teaching them to make the sweet.

The children at a remand home in Thane were happy to receive packets of sesame seed laddus (*tilgul*) on Makar Sankranti, thanks to the enthusiastic services of the members of RAC Thane North, RID 3142.

The 43-year-old club is one of the longest

running Rotaract clubs in the district, says its secretary Anushka Bachhas. Makar Sankranti is a solar festival celebrated pan India in January and is marked by a variety of rituals and traditions across the different states. In Maharashtra, it includes a cultural

practice of exchanging *tilgul*, a sweet ball made with sesame and jaggery. "It is a symbolism for being together in peace and joyfulness, despite the differences and uniqueness between individuals," explains Anushka.

When the club's vice-president Shrivani

Tapre suggested "bringing cheer to the children at the remand home by including them in the festival and giving them homemade *tilgul*," it was readily accepted by the members, says club president Abhishek Pandey.

To make it a personal and memorable experience, the



Rotaractors with winners of the *Spoorthi 2k23* sports event.

Rotaractors assembled at Shravani's home to learn to make the delicious laddus from her grandmother Anjali Keluskar. "It was such an extraordinary day filled with laughter and joy

as we bonded with my grandma and made about 650 laddus. I've never made those laddus at home myself, but because of Rotaract I learnt the skill and will continue the tradition

henceforth," smiles Shravani.

The sweet balls were packed and sealed in ziplock covers and, along with some of the inmates of the Divya Prabha Orphanage, the

Rotaractors visited the remand home on the eve of the festival and distributed the packets to 150 children lodged there.

The club has promised to support the annual education



Rotaractors dance with children on Janmashtami at the Dharmavir Anand Dighe Jidd Shala, an institution for the mentally-challenged.



Children hold aloft their creative artwork at the event *Hooner*, in the presence of Rotaractors.

of girl children at the Divya Prabha Orphanage under its project *Gift Education, Gift Life*, this year. “We have raised ₹44,600 so far through fundraisers including a musical nite, and through appeals on social media,” says Pandey. The club members and Rotarians have also contributed generously for the project. The club has been conducting various workshops in dance, music and personal grooming for the children at the orphanage. “We are planning to organise

spoken English classes and career counselling for them soon, and present a laptop to the orphanage to help the children with better knowledge,” he says.

The club organised *Spoorthi 2k23*, a sports competition for school children of Thane at the Shree Mavli Mandal High School ground. Club members Amey Sutar and Akash Pandey were the project chairmen, and with the support of a three-member committee comprising Anmol Deshmukh, Shrestha

Chakraborty and Ananya Mishra, the programme became a huge success and gave the club a good public image.

Hooner, organised by the club, is another inter-school competition which is eagerly awaited by schoolchildren every year. This year the programme was held at the Shreerang Vidyalaya School in Thane West. Over 3,000 children participated in various events such as essay writing, clay modelling, painting and drawing. The club raised around

₹2 lakh through the programme. Corporates such as BYJU'S, Kores India and HPCL were the co-sponsors.

Every year, the club members celebrate Krishna Janmashtami in August with the mentally-challenged children of the Dharmavir Anand Dighe Jidd Shala in Thane. Storytelling sessions, fancy dress and games such as *dahi handi* are organised for the children, after which they are served sweets and savouries. ■

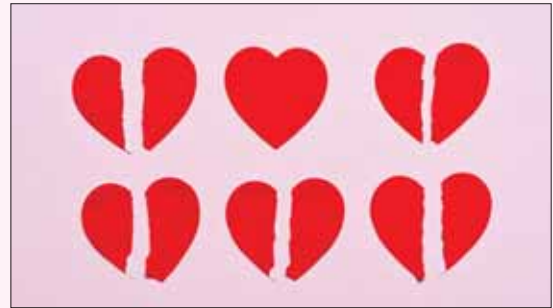
In Brief



Germany encourages eco-friendly travel

The German government has approved a monthly public

transport ticket for €49 (£43) that provides unlimited travel on regional trains, buses, trams and metro services. This initiative is part of efforts to promote environment-friendly travel and help reduce traffic congestion and air pollution.



New Zealand allocates funds for 'heartbreak'

The New Zealand government has announced a new initiative called "Love Better" aimed at helping teenagers cope with heartache after breakups. The programme, which has been allocated 6.4 million New Zealand dollars over three years, aims to help young people navigate relationship discourse and expectations.



Japan produces a flying bike

A new flying bike, marketed as the "world's first," has been released in Japan, with a price tag of nearly \$555,000. The vehicle, which weighs 661 pounds, is powered by two central rotors and a Kawasaki motor with 228 horsepower.



A massive marine park in Australia

A week after dropping plans for a coal mine near the Great Barrier Reef, the Australian government announced that it will create a marine park covering an area of more than 700,000 square miles (1.8 million sqkm), the size of Germany, in the waters surrounding Antarctica.



Octogenarian sings for environmental conservation

Silvia Dan, an 80-year-old Romanian folk singer, has released her debut album titled 'Silvia sings with Taraf de Caliu,' which will fund habitat restoration in the Carpathian Mountains. Dan spent her life caring for livestock on her smallholding in the Carpathians, where she learned the traditional folk songs that are featured in the album.

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