

# **Educating marginalised young people in Mauritius**

## **Nirmal Busgopaul, BETA Program**

### **Abstract**

This paper will showcase the various steps towards a community based program implemented by Halley Movement in Mauritius. It will also explain the successes and failures of BETA (Basic Education To Adolescent) Program. The author will try to demonstrate the realities working with 'Out of school youths' and the challenges involved.

The main highlights will be the following:

- Background of education and drop out rates within the educational system in Mauritius
- Results of survey carried out by Halley Movement and followup actions
- Community involvement and UNICEF's contribution
- Training of teachers and curriculum design
- Different approaches to the BETA program
- Successes and failures to date and feedback from official quarters

The powerpoint presentation will end by the author responding to queries from participants.

### **Background of Mauritius**

The Republic of Mauritius includes the Indian Ocean islands of Rodrigues, St Brandon and Agalega. We are in the Eastern coast of the Malagasy Republic. The islands' multiracial population consists of descendants of French, African, Indian, Chinese and British immigrants.

Mauritius was granted independence in 1968 and became a Republic in 1992. It is a member of the Commonwealth Nations, the Afro-Malagasy-Mauritian common organizations, and the organisation of African Unity, and has a special arrangement with the European Union under the Lomé Convention.

### **Volunteer Work in Mauritius**

Volunteer work is all about helping each other. Volunteering starts in the neighbourhood, followed by charity activity, and takes the form of voluntary social work. Volunteerism has existed before and is still playing an important part, today, in strengthening the ties that exist between the communities in Mauritius.

Helping people during funerals, weddings, disasters and emergency situations have always been a spontaneous gesture amongst the Mauritian population.

### **Background of Education and dropout rates**

Every year, some 7000 children of the age of 12 drop out of the Primary School system in Mauritius after having failed at their Terminal Certificate of Primary Education twice.

The formal school system consisting mostly of Government schools would presently absorb annually about a 1000 of them, the rest are left to themselves. Restricted in number, these schools do not serve many 'high risks' regions.

Fortunately, there are some Non-Governmental Organizations which attempt to offer some form of alternative education to many of these young people. This education may be either of a general, pre-vocational or vocational nature. In spite of their effort, still the majority of primary school dropouts are left unattended. There is a pressing need to increase educational provisions in this area both quantitatively and qualitatively.

One of the Non-Governmental organizations which is offering a 'second chance' to a few of them who have been dropped off the formal system of education is Halley Movement.

### **Halley Movement**

Halley Movement is a child and family oriented NGO. The organization runs various programs and these include:

- Advocacy
- Research
- Education
- Counseling, and
- Production of materials

### **Research Study**

Halley Movement carried out a research study with the financial support of UNICEF to look into causes of primary school failures. The objectives of the study were the following:

- Investigate into the factors associated with failure at CPE (Certificate of Primary Education) and to suggest remedial measures.
- To examine the influence of socio-economic status on academic performance.
- To document the background characteristics of school dropouts and parents and their perceptions of issues related to the study, so as to provide an understanding of the local conditions.

### **Findings of the study**

- The dropouts suffer from lack of parental control and support
- They come from low socio-economic status families
- The policy of automatic promotion in primary schools is worth considering.
- CPE curriculum is too overloaded.

### **Community Involvement and UNICEF**

Halley Movement conducted a training programme for a group of teachers who would embark on the project of providing basic education to the young dropouts. The training was carried out again with financial support from UNICEF.

The community, including religious and social leaders were encouraged to join in the project and identify potential dropouts who would be the participants of the dropouts programme.

For the purpose of this paper, I am going to concentrate on program, initiated by our organization and which aims at providing literacy and computer courses marginalized children in Mauritius. This program is called `Basic Education To Adolescents'-BETA program.

### ***BETA Program***

The Basic Education To Adolescent (BETA) Program is a pilot program which aims at providing functional literacy, numeracy and computer courses to primary schools dropouts. This program started as from May, 1998. Initially the program covers one class of some thirty (30) learners of six villages of the south of the island. These learners after failing the Primary terminal Examinations for two times have been pushed out of the school system.

The BETA Program represents a second chance for these marginalized youths to learn to read, write and acquire some essential skills which could be useful in their life. The curriculum has been designed in such a way as to include six different learning areas.

### **Objectives of BETA (Basic Education To Adolescents)**

I would like to give you the objectives of the program before enlisting the different learning areas.

The overall objectives of the BETA Program are:

- To combat exclusion and to facilitate social integration
- To enable everyone to participate fully in the socio-economic life of the country
- To empower young people for critical thinking and problem solving

### ***The Curriculum***

The curriculum therefore has been planned by educators from the technical team of Halley Movement keeping in mind the development pace of the targeted learners. This team has taken into account the physical resources, work programs, assessment criteria and extra - mural programs.

### **The learning Areas**

There are six different learning areas:

## Communication, literacy and language learning

People interact with the world and each other through language. The more we are able to communicate, the better we are able to understand each other. Improved communication can only lead to a society free of intolerance, misunderstanding and prejudice.

## Numeracy & Mathematics

Numeracy and Mathematics is a way of understanding the world. Mathematics encourages logical thinking, problem solving and teaches people analytical skills that will allow them to make critical decisions. This learning area will equip learners to cope with a rapidly changing technological environment.

## Natural Sciences

In order to manage the resources of the world effectively, people need to understand the universe-both natural and created by people. This learning area will equip our learners with the ability to understand our natural resources and to manage them effectively.

## Arts and Culture

Culture and the Arts are important areas of life. Through developing creativity and exploring the diverse cultures that exist, the spiritual, intellectual and emotional aspects of our personalities will be promoted. By the way, Mauritius being a multi cultural country, our learners need a better exploration of the various cultures.

## Computer Literacy

In actuality, computers, like any other discipline inspire different level of expertise. On the least specialized level, computer literacy involves knowing, how to turn on a computer, start and stop simple application programs, and save and print information.

## Life Orientation

We are actually living in a rapidly changing society. Mauritius has turned from an agricultural society to an industrial one. To cope with everyday challenges, learners need to develop life skills. Life orientation includes the building of self esteem, survival skills and a healthy life style.

## ***Achievements of the program***

The BETA Program is off to a good start. Learners are enthusiastic and are learning the basic information according to the learning areas. The volunteer instructors of the learning program are keen to contribute and are conscious to improve their skills.

Through volunteer service, the Halley Movement is effectively guiding the Mauritian children to foster a sense of citizenship and belongings to the society.

This program is one of the many programs that are run and managed by volunteers of Halley Movement in Mauritius.

### ***Constraints***

Volunteer work, however has some constraints. It has been noted that there is low participation in volunteer work especially among young people. The youth, give less interest in voluntary services compared to the past. The reasons for low participation in volunteering may have been caused by:

- Lack of information about volunteering
- People see no benefits of being volunteers
- Some volunteer organizations do not have managerial skills to operate their organization effectively.

Apart from the success that is visible; volunteers need to have tools of volunteer administration and management. Once volunteer work is managed professionally, it will be to the benefit of the care providers and to the beneficiaries as well. More volunteer work will mean reaching the deprived groups, to understand more the social problems and features and to contribute time to serve the needy.

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