

When you meet first Harsha, at first glance, she seems like just a normal student. But after ten minutes at the most, you come away deeply impressed. She told me how the Vedhas Foundation came about, about her team, “her” children and the difficulties she has experienced herself.

The coronavirus pandemic hit the German school system very hard, partly because of a lack of digitalisation. So you can imagine how difficult the lack of face-to-face teaching may have been – and still is – for emerging countries like India. In many schools, classes simply stopped, and children were left without education.

Harsha did not want to see this happen. She grew up in Nashik, a city of a million people about 150 km northeast of Mumbai. Her father is a businessman, her mother stayed at home. Harsha attended one of the government schools in the city, which was also attended by some children from the local slum, where about 10,000 people live. The school offers these children a chance at education, a chance to make an impact in their slum and, most importantly, a chance for change. However, in February 2020, these educational institutions were forced to close. While some schools have switched to online teaching by now, many children still do not have mobile phones or any other internet source. Throughout 2020, children and young people were not allowed to play on the streets of India; they were left alone at home in social isolation, and denied educational opportunities.

Harsha noticed this decline in the education system and decided to do something about it herself. She had already worked as a tutor and had campaigned for human rights. “I asked myself, ‘why we are all just watching so helplessly – why aren’t we doing something about it?’” Harsha said. This idea prompted her to set up the Vedhas Foundation, which she runs with local friends. The mission was very clear from the beginning: since every other kind of educational path was blocked off to these isolated children, the Foundation would offer them a different one. Since February 2021, the children have had the opportunity to actively learn with their Vedhas Foundation tutors on Sundays from 9 to 11 am. As Harsha put it, “We tried to establish activity-based learning. This means that we not only tutored the children in English and math, but also went to various institutions to give the children a new perspective. This included learning the essentials of life, such as being as hygienic as possible in the slums.” Another important part of the Vedhas Foundation is passing on human values. In India, treating girls and boys equally is not a given. Many girls grow up believing that their brothers are worth more than they themselves are, and they have to forego their

schooling so their brothers can attend. Vedhas tries to show the girls their true value and to encourage them on their educational path.

**» With Vedhas, we want to create a safe environment for the children who come to us. «**

— Harsha Poojari

Since then, the Vedhas Foundation has grown to a team of 30 people, with eight founding members divided between organisation, teaching and promotion on social media. In addition, numerous tutors encourage the children in their schooling. “But we are always looking for new volunteers to support the children,” commented Harsha. This is also possible online. Anyone interested can contact her via the Vedhas Foundation’s Instagram channel, @vedhas\_org.

















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