

Devotion Towards a Progressive Society Sobha's Graamasobha Uplifts and Transforms Lives in Rural India

It was quite early in the business that PNC Menon, Founder of Sobha Ltd. and Sobha Group of Companies, understood that growth in business results from the participation of growth-oriented people around; free of poverty and brimming with hope and enthusiasm to contribute their bit to the society. Hence, Corporate Social Responsibility takes a whole new meaning in Sobha Ltd., stemming out of genuine concern to provide a comprehensive and sustainable development to rural India and the people who are happy to be a part of Sobha's business. Archana Sinha finds out how PNC Menon developed a sustainable model for rural growth.



PNC Menon

Conscious of the fact that every section of the society need to live in dignity by cutting the chains of poverty, hunger and illiteracy, besides poor health so that each one can contribute to the society and sharing the responsibility of progressing together, PNC Menon formed Sri Kurumba Educational and Charitable Trust and initiated Graamasobha around Veddakechery, Kizakkenchery and Kannaumbra villages Grama Panchayats in Palakkad district of Kerala, his home State, in 2006. Together with the Gram Panchayats, the Trust identified nearly 4525 families (around 17,311 people)

from the BPL bracket. The Trust issued beneficiary cards to the adopted families and has authentic data about each beneficiary and their specific requirements. With the Trust taking care of education, healthcare and housing, the lives of thousands of underprivileged people are getting transformed as they look forward to a better future; leaving a poverty-ridden life far behind. The most important aspect of this effort that is visible now is that the youngsters' dream of becoming engineers, doctors, astronauts, chartered and cost accountants, banking and law officers, beauty

“

Sobha Icon is yet another initiative aimed at creating icons for India by making high-quality learning opportunities available for deserving students of other government schools who have exceptional skills but not the opportunities to grow

”



specialists, sportspeople and so on. They are well-informed about the trending jobs and new avenues and many compete in events such as Spellbee Competitions, Olympiads, etc.

Key Social Projects

(a) Sobha Hermitage, a unique senior citizens' and widows' home with world-class amenities, (b) Sobha Health Care, a primary health centre with best-in-class facilities for medical treatment, (c) Sobha Academy, an exclusive educational institution for the underprivileged children, (d) Sobha Icon, another educational initiative to improve the standards of government school students in higher classes, (e) Sobha Rural Women Empowerment, (f) Sobha's 'Mission:

Zero Landless Kerala' by proposing to donate three cents of land each to 50 landless people (Cent is a term used in the measurement of land in Southern India. A Cent is approximately equal to 435.5 sq.ft.), (h) Social Rehabilitation Scheme for the people of the three backward Panchayats.

Sobha Academy

It was started in 2007 to empower and enable the rural poor to break away from the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, deprivation, and exclusion by providing their children with a high-quality education. Selection to the Academy is done through an open draw from a list of eligible candidates shortlisted after intense research. During 2018-19, 1137 students in the Vadakkenchery, Kizhakkenchery and

Kannambra Panchayats were on the rolls from LKG to Class 12.

Every academic year, 90 students (3 Divisions of 30 each) are taken in. Once admitted, all the children's requirements, including food, transportation, uniforms, books, medical care, etc., are provided free of cost. It is indeed a pleasure to see the children being happy, and learning for them is fun. Creatively-designed classrooms are clean, airy and very colourful. The bathrooms are clean and hygienic. The dining areas and the kitchen and cold storage are just as modern as one would expect. The food prepared for the children is nutritious. The library, the computer lab and the science lab too are made on modern parameters with enough workstations for the children to enjoy learning and complete their studies on time.





Sobha Icon

This is yet another initiative aimed at creating icons for India by making high-quality learning opportunities available for deserving students of other government schools who have exceptional skills but not the opportunities to grow. Regular academic professionals have been engaged to enhance the performance of more than 250 students. The students are serious about their studies and they are given coaching, lab and library facilities, besides guidance for better performance.

For Sobha Academy, Sobha Icon, Sobha Icon Higher Secondary as well as Sobha Shadow Icon, there are regular parents' meetings to discuss the progress of their children to maximise the benefit to their children.

Sobha Icon Higher Secondary Course is a two-year full-time on-campus, regular, six-day intense, technology-driven, professional college enrolment-oriented programme for a batch of 60 students each, in Science and Commerce, being conducted at Sobha Icon Campus which is registered with the Kerala State Open School for certification. The Trust also

provides financial assistance to students from poor families who obtain merit seats for engineering and medical courses. All their expenses are covered, including tuition fees, uniforms, books and basic accessories. It was interesting to see students engaging in debates, discussions, speech-giving and knowledge-sharing activities. Some of the girl students of both Sobha Academy and Sobha Icon Schools and Centres are given hostel facilities free of cost if the situation demands, such as non-conducive atmosphere at home or extreme poverty, whereby parents cannot





afford education for their children.

Sobha Hermitage, located on 23 acres of verdant green estate, is the most benevolent home one can hope to find for the deprived. It is the epitome of humanity, offering love, care, and support to the neglected sections of society, senior citizens as well as young widows (referred to as young mothers) and their children. The residents stay in a secular and secure environment where they are provided food, clothing, shelter, premium resources and services along with the best facilities.

A comprehensive rehabilitation package for the young mothers (widows) living in the Hermitage is in operation. Special arrangements are in place for their living, safety, security and welfare, free of cost. The widowed mothers and their children live together. They are encouraged to

continue their education; most of them have completed their graduation and others are catching up. They are employed in Sobha Academy with a good remuneration enabling them to save for personal use. Their children are admitted to the prestigious Sobha Academy where they obtain a quality education. Special arrangements are made to teach music and dances to these children in the school. Separate living apartments are being constructed for the mothers to move into as their children become older. Support is also provided if they want to remarry.

In short, an integrated social rehabilitation for the hapless widows, saving them from exploitation, is in full swing at the Hermitage with great success. Perhaps an initiative with so much depth and devotion may not be found in the country and this is

another example of Sobha's philosophy of social service, 'Devotion at Work'.

Healthcare Centre

The Sobha Healthcare Centre has redefined the limits of primary healthcare institutions in the country. The target group comprises nearly 4485 BPL families of the adopted Panchayats, senior citizens of Sobha Hermitage, students of Sobha Academy and their parents. Facilities include free consultation, diagnosis, tests, treatment, and medicines. The Centre has also set up outreach counters to reach out to the needy at their doorsteps.

Extending the health programme to a wider section of the society, an awareness programme - Cancer is Curable - was organised by the Trust on October 12, 2012, which was

What They Say



"I am never completely satisfied. I feel that there is so much more to progress towards quality."

- PNC Menon
Founder - Sobha Ltd., and
Sobha Group of Companies

"A truly inspirational visit and one that will never be forgotten. What Sobha is doing throughout this project is nothing short of astounding. It makes me so proud to be a part of the Sobha family. My visit to all the project sites was a humbling experience. My dream visit to this beautiful country of India could not have started on a more inspiring manner."

- David Twist
General Manager - QA/QC,
Sobha LLC, Dubai



"I have never seen a place of this standard. I have been in the field of education for the last 18 years but the Sobha Academy has set new standards in terms of design, creativity, cleanliness and discipline. Keep up the good work."

- Dr Lakshmi Ravi
Director, Asan Memorial Dental
College, Chennai



conducted by renowned Oncologist Dr V.P. Gangadharan. A large number of people participated and benefited out of this programme. Between 2017 and 2019, more than 15,000 outpatients have been treated. More than two lakh patients have been treated so far under this initiative which goes to prove that such centres play an important role in bringing quality healthcare at an affordable, and at most of time, free of cost. Beneficiaries are being monitored and counselled at regular intervals to ensure they remain healthy and adopt good healthy habits.

Vocational Training Courses

The Sobha Vocational Training Centre (SVTC) aims at providing functional vocational training and paid apprenticeships in carpentry to youth from poor families. Plans are afoot to add more trade-oriented skill development schemes so that the entire Graamasobha is well developed to find sustainable livelihoods and lead good progressive lives. The goal is that these villages must be model villages where youth find happiness and create a progressive society out of their efforts and innovation.

Direct and indirect employment is

provided to many through SVTC. Besides this, other centres have also been established for imparting training in computers, music and tailoring.

The Sri Kurumba Educational and Charitable Trust have been highly active in providing relief to flood-hit families in Vadakkenchery and Kizhakkenchery Panchayats. Families were assisted in the reconstruction of their damaged houses. It also assists with other projects such as maintaining community pond, sponsoring students who get admissions to engineering and medical graduate courses but have no financial means to carry on their studies.

All CSR programmes and projects embarked upon by the Sri Kurumba Educational and Charitable Trust are implemented in consultation with the local Panchayat authorities without placing any financial burden on them. Sobha Group strongly believes that if an initiative like Graamasobha, in which adoption of one or two Panchayats can be taken up by other companies, institutions and organisations, then it could change India's poverty equation forever and bring about a sea change in the social fabric of this country. ■