

It's sweet home to underprivileged children

FAIZA HANEEF

HERE are warm smiles on their faces and confidence in their eyes. For over 100 children from poor families, *Shishu Mandir*, a school for the underprivileged, is a dream come true. And the person instrumental for this is Hella Mundhra, a German lady, who they fondly call "mamma."

Working with the motto "*Schau auf zu den Sternen, hab Acht auf die Gassen*", which means "Look up to the stars, beware of the streets," *Shishu Mandir* is the brainchild of Hella, a doctor by profession, a teacher at heart.

Started in 1993, *Shishu Mandir* today provides for all the requirements of the children it houses, including meals, books, clothes and living.

It all began with the setting up of a nursing home in the City, which served the poor, especially children. When a few of the hospitalised children expressed a wish not to return home, Hella and her husband, extended the nursing home to a 'home', which was later called 'Shishu Mandir Society'.

The society, which was initially funded by the nursing home, later received private donations to provide shelter for more children. As the numbers increased, the children were accommodated in two houses in Ulsoor.

When Hella realised that the children were unable to cope with the regular teaching system, she started a school of her own on an experimental basis.

"The idea was to give them individual attention and child-oriented teaching, at which regular



A view of the Shishu Mandir.



Hella teaches the children using toys and stories as aids.

schooling fails," says Hella. "I wanted our children to experience learning as a process of fun and my focus was on the child's all round development. Here at *Shishu Mandir*, we make use of visual aids and make children participate in the thinking process instead of offering ready-made solutions. This made all the difference in their understanding," she adds.

In 2000, a three-storey building was built in K R Puram. Currently, the school has two

prep classes, apart from class I to X. It caters to the educational needs of about 116 children from the four nearby villages. There are 26 staff members, which includes a few volunteers from Germany and five helpers.

Importance is given to computer education, music, arts, crafts and training in carpentry; tailoring is also compulsory for the students from Class IV.

Apart from this, the school also includes a community hall that is offered to slum dwellers, who hold various activities there.

When asked about her future ventures, Hella, who lives in Germany and visits

the City twice a year, says, "I want to start a vocational training centre in the school premises, which will provide technical training in carpentry, tailoring and other courses."

About her achievements, she says, "Two students of *Shishu Mandir* have reached the masters degree level today and this my greatest achievement."

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