

Community-solution model of crime prevention

EMPOWERMENT



KIRAN BEDI

Growing incidents of crime, sexual assaults and harassment continue to make headlines every day. We all react and demand penalties with remedies, till the next crime hits us. As one who believes in the power of prevention, I feel extremely distressed as many such incidents are preventable.

Here, I share a long-term community-solution model of crime prevention which, if put in place, can bring such crimes under check.

These are time-tested, cost-effective, community solutions, provided we begin early. We work with the youth at the right age. We instil responsibility in them.

The question emerges: what is the right age for the youth to take responsibility? One surely need not wait to reach the age of 25 or 30 to take charge. As observed, leadership values have to be sown at the early age of 12, with children being guided to be conscientious about self, society and nation at large. We got to catch them when impressionable.

The model is 'Navjyoti Bal Gurukul' developed by my 26-year-old Navjyoti India Foundation working with vulnerable sections of society through a collaborative, trans-

formative and social model.

The organisation works with marginalised sections of society where the youth and children have the propensity to peddle and consume drugs, pick pockets, beg and indulge in a whole lot of deviant activities if left to themselves.

ADDRESSING FACTORS LEADING TO CRIME

Navjyoti's crime prevention model focuses on addressing factors that lead to crime, primarily early childhood neglect and abuse, illiteracy, ignorance of parents, peer pressure, lack of moral education, school neglect, risky behaviours, cognitive deficit, unemployment, family dysfunction and absence of community support.

Navjyoti, through its Bal Gurukul model, has on its rolls over 2,500 children from a sprawling settlement being groomed to take up responsibility towards their own community. It is truly a children university of values, running amid the slums of north-west Delhi.

The young children have identified various departments, such as academics, character-building and value education, sports and yoga, performing arts, IT skills, special education, gender studies and environment based on the community needs, which are being self-governed by head of departments and children faculty. Each department has set their own mission statement.

BUILDING VALUE SYSTEM

These children are not only growing up acquiring education but are also instilling the spirit of community service and nation-building. The approach involves participation of both girls and boys, with the focus to empower girls and make boys more responsible. It is a movement wherein children are being trained on building stronger foundations for value system and character building and developing the right kind of attitude and behaviour to become productive and entrepreneurial. The training builds curiosity among the children of Navjyoti Bal Gurukul for self-enhancement, self-discovery, propensity for special skills and hunger for knowledge, research and social service.

There is spirit to learn from each other which is transformative, apart from mutually helping out weak students. As many as 72 such centres have been opened by them, reaching out to 430 children in bylanes, parks, temples and mosques.

The department of gender studies of the Delhi govern-

ment is already working with them on issues of child marriage. When asked if they had witnessed such an issue in their community, the quick response was, "It happened in my family with my cousin," by a 13-year-old girl, who raised her hand wanting to share her concern. Another 14-year-old girl said, "My friend in the neighbourhood was married at 12, so I want to work for the empowerment of girls and women."

Yusuf, a 14-year-old boy, was happy to share how last week he counselled five students in the age group of 15-16 who were consuming drugs. The child faculty from performing arts and sports are channelising the energy of other children in the community in the right direction by teaching them dance, arts and yoga, and preventing them from whiling away their time. The model is creating a positive ripple effect in the community.

The students are being trained to resolve their problems and issues of the community using 3 C techniques, listing down the Challenge, the Choices against the problem, and the Consequences against each choice and then

finally deciding on the course of action.

Navjyoti Bal Gurukul recognises promotion of the contribution of young people and children in preventing crime, corruption and fostering a culture of respect for law, values and integrity. It truly envisions developing a community of children having value-based leadership who grow up to take charge, lead change and not just simply live.

REPLICATING THE MODEL

Navjyoti Bal Gurukul can be a model that can be replicated by NGOs, panchayats, resident welfare organisations, community workers and others. It aims to generate responsible holistic leadership which could be in any field, whether social, entrepreneurial and gender awareness with an ultimate objective of self-reliance.

Learning to respect women and developing a good character begins early. Unless we, the elders, help children begin early, laws, agitations and punishments will not be of much help.

We can impart them responsibility early. The onus is on us as a community and our governance, and not on agitations or punishments.

Depends, what we spend our energy on. And what do we really want?

(With inputs from Chandri Taneja, director, Navjyoti India Foundation)

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