

Inspiring students

While career-oriented students are often pushed into the rat race, **TANYA PINTO** finds that Nirmaan is helping students make a difference to the world around them

Goa's prestigious BITS-Pilani University is known for its excellent academic standing. However, its social outreach unit, popularly known as Nirmaan, deserves equal appreciation. Established on 2nd October 2007, Nirmaan is focused on improving the lives of the underprivileged. Nirmaan's social initiatives are aimed at empowering disadvantaged youth, especially those who live in the Zari slum areas adjoining Zuari Industries Limited. Two of their programmes, namely Teach Zari and Shiksha, have been highly efficient in improving the educational status of the underprivileged youth in slums. The project Shiksha trains students from the fifth standard in Mathematics and Logic, helping them to perform well in the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Selection Test. Teach Zari offers training in English and basic Mathematics to younger students. This is a truly commendable contribution, since education is the best way to break the vicious cycle of poverty. Nirmaan has also helped several women become financially independent, by supporting the setting up of a self-help group, as part of the project 'Employment Operations.' Due to this initiative, women from the Zari slum have started a Self-Help group named Ashadeep, and are trained in vocational skills such as candle making and paper bag making. This has helped them develop entrepreneurship skills, and also earn a livelihood. Besides education and employment, Nirmaan also has a health-focused programme. 'Health Operations' is a health-related initiative, which helps to create awareness about the importance of hygiene and adequate sanitation.

Beyond the Zari slum, Nirmaan also has a wide state-level impact.



The organization offers Career Counseling services to school children across Goa. Through this initiative, SSC students are given guidance by means of Career Counseling sessions and a helpline they can contact. This assistance is provided by dedicated students of BITS-Pilani University itself. As shared through the organisation's blog, BITS student Tulasi Ravindran expresses, "I've often been questioned on my motivation to teach these stu-

dents. People find this act noble yet perplexing. They figure it's for the bigger picture, they figure it's for the greater good but for me rather I've had different reasons. In response I have always said the same thing, I've told them that it's the little things. It's their bright faces masked with curiosity when they enter class even after a long school day. It's the distinct way they call out 'Didi! Didi!' when they think they've solved a question. It's the way their eager eyes twinkle when they've finally understood a baffling math concept. It's the way they offer to pacify the other children so that I can continue teaching. It's the way they beckon me to come tomorrow to teach them again. It's the conviction they have with their answers though it is wrong. It's the way they wish me happiness for the forthcoming festivals."

While there are several charitable organizations in Goa, Nirmaan is unique because it inspires young students to become socially conscious. Many of the outreach volunteers are students at the university, and are committed to making a difference to society. While career-oriented students are often pushed to become a part of the world's rat race, Nirmaan is helping students to make a difference to the world around them.

