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## Lessons outside the classroom



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A GOOD SAMARITAN: Bhagya Rangachar, Founder and Managing Trustee of Children's Lovecastle Trust India, is determined to make a difference to the lives of poor children studying in government schools (right) by holding enrichment programmes. — PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

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## PHOTOS



When most of us are content blaming the education system for all the ills, there are those who take it upon themselves to change the system.

Bhagya Rangachar, founder of the Children's Love Castle Trust (CLT), has decided to change the lives of schoolchildren by a simple intervention: a midday meal. She began by providing a nutritious meal to the children of Basavanagudi Government School – well before the Government even conceived of the idea.

Ms. Rangachar came to Bangalore in 1997 from the U.S., and settled down in an apartment in Basavanagudi, where she befriended children from a neighbouring construction site. She visited their school (the Basavanagudi Government School) and realised that most children there could not afford a meal. "To them, lunch wasn't an event as it is to most of us," said Ms. Rangachar.

"Having lived most of my life in the U.S., I wasn't aware of the challenges that Indian government schools were facing," said Ms. Rangachar. She could not digest the fact that children were being made to study on hungry stomachs. She said, "How can children study History in the afternoon when they are hungry? How can they possibly concentrate in class?," she asked.

### **A castle each**

She mobilised sponsors and created the Children's Lovecastle Trust (in Jakkur), which went on to adopt the school. "All children build castles of sand, we wanted to create the support system that would enable every child to build a castle of their own," she said. Ms. Rangachar ensured that hot and healthy food was served to the children of the Basavangudi Government School. Every day, after sending her children to school, she would drive up to Cubbon Park, where a vegetable seller would fill her car with produce after she gave him a budget (of about Rs. 100). She would then drive to the school where a cook was appointed to cook the food. "I wouldn't store any supplies because I didn't want the food to spoil or get stolen," she said. Ms. Rangachar funded the buying of utensils and paid the salaries of a cook and a cleaner. After a year, the trust adopted a school in Poornapura. Within seven years, it has adopted eight schools and started a "food-bank programme and an Anganwadi Milk Programme. When the State Government began the midday meal scheme, CLT supplemented the food with milk and eggs. But after the midday meal programme was extended to Jakkur, it scrapped the food-bank programme.

After 12 years, CLT has created a "multimedia content repository", and is involved in training teachers, promoting e-learning, initiating after school programmes and funding college scholarships. "Our aim now is to focus on how children learn, and to give children the confidence they need to do anything they want to," said Ms. Rangachar.

Meghana Chandra

and Rashi Rathi

***Bhagya Rangachar introduced midday meals in a Basavanagudi school before the Government thought of it***