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An alternate rhythm

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Different drum: Snehadhara uses visual arts to help children express themselves. Photo: G.P. Sampath Kumar

The Hindu

Arts-based therapy centres that use music and dance to help the differently abled are making their presence in Bangalore. Rashmika Majumdar takes a tour

Music, art and dance is all it takes to connect mind, body and soul. When these expressive arts help the differently-abled overcome their challenges and express their voices, Art-Based Therapy (ABT) becomes an important and powerful tool

A home for everyone

Snehadhara, an ABT centre in JP Nagar uses multi-arts to help its students with motor, language and speech, cognitive, sensory and social skills. Research to refine and improve methodologies using ABT is also carried out at the centre.

The foundation, started in December 2013, uses voice, language, songs, dance, drama, puppetry, story-telling, drumming, music and visual arts to help children and adolescents with skills and self-expression. It works with differently-abled children and adults, their caregivers and parents.

“The differently-abled seem to experience the world in their own ways as their perceptual world varies from ours,” says Gitanjali Sarangan, the director of Snehadhara Foundation. “We can make learning a fun filled creative journey for them with the help of music, songs, drama, plays in different languages and visual arts.” The organisation has 10 facilitators and seven caregivers who engage the students in different activities on a daily basis. A unique feature is the Oota Thota, an activity which encourages students to prepare food from scratch as a form of therapy.

“When students go out with us and buy the necessary ingredients, it helps to build their sense of weights and measures. The smell, the taste and cooking helps develop their sensory perceptions,” Gitanjali adds.

Pallavi Chandra, a therapist at Snehadhara feels art lies in the process and not the product. She and other facilitators use dramatics, storytelling and role-play to help children.

“For instance, while staging a drama every aspect from script, costumes, stage props to backstage activities and performing can be deconstructed to achieve a certain physical or emotional goal and help one overcome a certain challenge.”

On a new note

Vocal, instrumental and rhythmic movements in music and musical instruments can be applied to achieve developmental goals in autism. With this conviction, Ganesh Anantharaman heads the Sampoorana Music Therapy Center for Children with Autism in Horamavu. With 11 students and four therapists, the organisation completes its first year in January. Their focus is developing skills in social, emotional, motor and cognitive areas for children in the spectrum through a structured, wide-ranging and long-term music intervention program.

“Music and movement therapy evokes the innate desire and motivation for self-expression and self-regulation in children on the spectrum. This expression seems to be a reward in itself, an affirmation of the personhood of each child,” writes Anantharaman in an article on a web magazine, *The Alternative*. Individual and group sessions are

conducted for children at the centre with a different module depending on each child's need. Group sessions involve instrumental improvisations and singing. "A child who in February, would only play instruments and listen to the instructor, can now hum and sing. Another child who had speech difficulties can now sing full lines of a song. The progress varies in each child," says Shruthi V Kumar, a therapist at Sampoorna.

Using rhythm and movement

Studio for Movement Arts and Therapies at Richmond Town has initiated art and movement therapy programmes for children with learning disabilities in Bangalore since 2010. Movement is used as a medium to gain access to the subconscious and thoughts for a positive change. The centre also provides an intensive one-year certificate training course for creative arts therapy and organises workshops for therapists.

"Every child is different and before designing any activity, we first assess the child. The activity is goal oriented and depends where the child is on the spectrum. These activities help develop his gross and fine motor skills," says Brinda Jacob Janvrin, founder of the centre. "Some autistic children respond well to music, while others might not. Sometimes, it takes months to help the child maintain eye-contact. It is a slow and effective process which may take about a year to show results," she adds. Just like any form of therapy, ABT too requires time and patience. With care and long-term programs like these, children and adults with various difficulties can be empowered to use the arts to express their world.

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