

Art courses help those with special needs

Therapy centres in the city promise to build skills and improve confidence, but are wary of parents who are impatient

by Shyama Krishna Kumar

Bangalore: Art-based therapy centres for people with special needs are becoming more widespread in the city. While most therapists agree that these forms generally take time to show results, they maintain that they are effective. *City Express* lists out a few centres in Bangalore.

SAMPOORNA MUSIC THERAPY CENTRE

Sampoorna Music Therapy Center (For Children with Autism), situated in Horamavu, uses music as therapy to help children on the autism spectrum develop skills and abilities that they need to adapt to their environment, and thus become more of who they truly are.

"Music helps these children develop skills of three kinds. It helps them connect with their emotions, it helps in developing communication skills and finally, it builds behavior skills that will help children adapt in less familiar environments," says Ritu Gopal, one of the three music therapists at Sampoorna.

Ritu also informs that therapy is a slow process and it will take anywhere from six months to more to notice any significant changes in the child. "We let the children explore the music room and the various instruments we have, ranging from xylophones to the djembe to rattles, simple instruments the children can pick up. When they start showing interest in a specific instrument, we initiate them into it," explains Ritu, who plays



The therapy involves teaching the students painting, dance, singing or playing an instrument and developing their relationship with the outer world

the violin, mainly used as receptive music for the children.

The music sessions also help in building necessary relationship skills for the children, where they learn to interact with the trainer in the beginning, and then apply the skills in the outer world. The centre has children who are both verbal and non-verbal, at the moment. There are 12 children in all, and each child attends one one-on-one session and one group session every week. Every third Saturday, the centre has a live music concert,

so children can enjoy the music along with their families. "Most of these kids cannot attend live concerts. This gives them a chance to adapt to such an environment and also spend quality time with their parents," explains Ritu.

(#35, 6th Cross, 10th Main, Nandanam Colony, Horamavu. Ph: 98804-25914)

STUDIO FOR MOVEMENT ARTS AND THERAPIES

Studio for Movement Arts and Therapies (SMArT) is a trust that has offered



movement based therapy for children with special needs since 2010. The studio also provides a one-year certificate programme for therapists or individuals who want to use movement arts as therapy, which also includes therapy for children with special needs.

As of now, the studio does not provide group sessions for children with special needs but one-on-one sessions take place regularly. Currently, four to five children visit the studio. "Before assigning a

particular course to the

child, we assess their needs along with the parent and set goals that need to be achieved through the sessions. Depending on the goals, we first decide on four to six sessions for the child, at the end of which we receive feedback and decide on future course," says Priyanka Pai, director, SMArT. Movement arts typically help children develop fine and gross motor skills along with helping them lead a more inclusive life in the mainstream arena.

(#37/4, Tank Road, Ulsoor, Landmark: diagonally op-

posite Lakeside Hospital. Ph: 98452-36242)

SNEHADHARA FOUNDATION

Snehadhara Foundation, an arts based therapy (ABT) centre located on Bannerghatta Road, uses various forms of art to help differently-abled children express themselves and learn crucial life skills. The centre uses all forms of art, from dance to music to theatre to fine arts to even cooking, to help children achieve specific goals, which could be in the form

of certain life skills or specific motor skills or even academic goals.

"I have been working with children for quite a few years now. What I've learned is that learning is most effective when it takes place in an organic manner, and what better way to learn than art. It is the most uninhibited form of learning there is," says Gitanjali Sarangan, the director of Snehadhara Foundation.

(#1653, 8th Cross, 17th Main Rd, Phase 2, J P Nagar. Ph: 98801-14551)

MEERA CENTRE FOR MUSIC THERAPY

This centre, while also using art and yoga for rehabilitation, primarily focuses on music as a form of therapy for girls and women between the ages of 12 to 35, most of them slow learners, autistic, hyperactive or with speech or other psychological problems.

Its founder Meenakshi Ravi, born into a family of musicians, experimented with the therapeutic effects of music during her over-20-year stint as a marital counsellor. She believes in healing through melody or Naadopasana.

Currently, the centre has about six people in the day care centre, which operates between 10 am and 4 pm. In the evenings, music therapy sessions are open to both girls and boys with special needs.

According to the therapist, one of the biggest challenges that she and her team face is lack of patience. "People expect instant results, as if they are eating in Darshini's. Sometimes, it takes over a year and even educated parents fail to understand that."

But in those who do continue, she and her colleagues have observed an increased attention span, better eye contact, better overall muscular coordination and even improved confidence and self-esteem, thanks to monthly small-scale performances that they hold to motivate the kids.

(#79, 2nd Main, Ramrao Layout, Banashankari 3rd Stage. Ph: 95350-55252)