The power of education

Nelson Mandela said education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. Life Global Australia was founded largely because Chairperson Dr Dipti McGowan witnessed that weapon in use.

Dr McGowan's family was originally from Gujarat and, on a visit to her family's ancestral village, she saw the effects of the transformation of a school by Project *Life*. At this school, the children had been getting a part-time education as there were not enough classrooms, so lessons were conducted in shifts. Temperatures in summer were 40 degrees and more, and rain came into the rooms during monsoons. This situation was not unusual in a region devastated by an earthquake in 2000.

Dr McGowan's father decided to donate the funds necessary for Project *Life* to build a new school in Mulchand. A year later, Dr McGowan attended the opening that led to LifeGA's foundation, and its ongoing partnership with Project *Life*.

"I was extremely impressed by the big picture view with which Project Life approached its work. *It is always looking to improve lives by giving people autonomy and creating lasting change,"* Dr McGowan said.

Education is one of the basic rights of every child, according to the United Nations. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that education can mean lifting a vulnerable child and their family out of poverty. UNICEF states that for many children around the world, going to school can be the only opportunity to receive nutritious food and clean water, or a young girl's only chance to break down gender barriers.

Dr McGowan saw that school buildings often did not meet the needs of the students.

"The lack of separate toilets for girls, for example, meant that they did not attend school consistently, and young girls were being withdrawn to help with working on farms and at home."

Dr McGowan was particularly aware of this issue as her own mother was withdrawn from school after completing Grade 3 to help at home with younger siblings. Consequently, she made it a priority to ensure the education of her daughter, giving Dr McGowan the opportunity to carve out a successful career based on her studies, and experience firsthand the benefit education can bring to an individual, family, extended family and community.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child particularly stipulates the encouragement of regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

Amisha was a student at Mulchand when Dr McGowan attended the opening ceremony. Her life changed when the new school was built.

"We suffered severely with dark and unlit classrooms, especially in monsoon with water everywhere," Amisha said.

The new school was constructed as a modern facility with spacious, naturally lit, well-ventilated classrooms. Mulchand is now a "Smart School" in which technology is embedded in the curriculum and pedagogy, thus increasing communication, student engagement, and learning outcomes. As a result, the school has been able to educate thousands of students from poor families.

Amisha is now studying for a degree in Commerce, and is confident her education at Mulchand will ensure her family's financial security.

"I knew we needed to encourage young children to remain in education by providing a good environment for study," Dr McGowan said. *"**They then have a chance to explore and prosper**, and both students and the community can develop."*

Dr McGowan has now attended the opening of several schools, and has spoken to staff about the effect of school transformations on their working lives. They told her that with safe, solid school rooms and buildings, schooling is no longer interrupted by weather.

*"**We can now actually complete the curriculum**,"* one teacher said. *"We can focus on teaching, and pedagogy, what we all got into teaching to do. We can also run clubs and extracurricular activities with the donors providing sports and music equipment. In essence, we can practise our craft, do curriculum differentiation and help students reach their potential, whether it is in academics, sports or the arts."*

By 2023, Project *Life* had rebuilt 108 schools. The schools won international excellence grants for rural and regional schools in developing countries such as India.

LifeGA is proud of its success in supporting women's empowerment, health programmes and bolstering primary education in rural communities. Our first GoFundMe campaign raised funds for 25+ women to be supported, and we are launching our most ambitious project of building an entire school (see https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-us-to-build-a-school-in-rural-remote-india).

"LifeGA aims to build five state-of-the-art schools in some of the poorest areas of India, and has already received donations to support that goal," Dr McGowan said.

LifeGA wants to use the powerful weapon of education to support, sustain and enrich people's lives.

Find out more about us on our website: www.lifeglobal.org.au

If you would like to keep up-to-date with Life Global Australia, enter your details here.

Our Vision

To support, sustain and enrich people's lives.

Our Mission

To work to prevent and relieve poverty through education, training and health for public benefit. We partner with well-established charities that share our vision.

Our Partner

Project 'Life' is dedicated to creating long-term impact by empowering lives through diverse programs.