

Signs of success

CHILDREN Physically challenged kids learn about their strengths and leadership qualities at a workshop. K. JESHI reports

There were video clippings, power point presentations and plenty of signs, smiles and gestures – all to communicate what it takes to become a leader. And, the two-day Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) 2008 for the physical challenged, organised by Rotary Club of Coimbatore Textcity, was all about identifying and motivating the leader in every child.

Twenty five girls and an equal number of boys, all hearing and speech impaired, studying in special schools in Palayamkottai, Bengaluru, Trichy and Coimbatore, came together at the Gujarati Samaj auditorium to understand their world of communication better. And giving them motivational tips were people who have made a difference in their lives by overcoming disability.

Role models

C. Radhakrishna Reddy, head of the silent world of Aashwasan Foundation that works for the uplift of the deaf, is one of them. And, K. Murali, who heads Deaf Leaders, that looks at education, empowerment, employment and rehabilitation of the deaf, was there to inspire the students to dream big.

Another shining example is Babu, who is hearing and speech impaired, and teaches at the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University. "Learn to take success and failure in your stride," Radhakrishna Reddy told the audience in sign language. And, Murali repeated the signs to make sure that the message reached every student.

Lessons on life

"Chennai is not always hot, and Coimbatore is not cold through the year" - this example of changing seasons was used to convey the cycle of ups and downs in life. "Never feel inferior. The visually challenged use their brain to learn; you should use sign language to do the same. Take guidance from 'normal' people and



MOTIVATION The key PHOTOS: M. PERIASAMY

gain in-depth knowledge," was the other message.

The need to be aware of the environment, the plants around us, increasing pollution levels, open drains, problems caused by felling of trees was also put forth.

"When it rains, you should know that you must carry an umbrella. Understand your strengths; never think of your disability as a deterrent to your progress," says Radhakrishna Reddy.

A video clipping was shown to help them learn signs that indicate vehicles. From a bus to a car to a submarine to rocket ... "To show a boat, first show the move-

ment of the sea. Practise regularly," said Radhakrishna Reddy.

Understanding Signing Exact English (SEE) and using grammar in sign language were also discussed. The role of SEE in developing literacy skills was conveyed to students.

Inspiring

When the inspiring video on Kajal Dhawan, the national award winner for empowerment of persons with disabilities, was shown, the students raised their hands and waved their fingers in appreciation. Kajal, who works as an executive with the Confeder-

ation of Indian Industry, and has won medals in sports in a number of international events, and participated in beauty contests, says she is determined to reach greater heights.

"So many students told us they want to come up like Kajal," says G. Poongothal, sign language teacher and interpreter at Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University.

"And, the presence of role models such as K. Murali boosted their confidence levels. They became aware that they can shine in so many fields," she adds.

For the students, it was also time to make a lot of friends. "Sign is their mother tongue. So, when they meet new people, they learn so many different signs and forge bonds of friendship. The teachers also learnt new signs," adds Poongothal.

The objective of the event is to help such children come out of their shell and give them an opportunity to express their talents and boost their confidence, says K.I. Antony Johnson, RYLA chairman. "This year, we have brought in students from outside too to make sure that they have a rewarding experience."

**NEVER THINK OF
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YOUR PROGRESS
RADHAKRISHNA
REDDY**

