



SIFF SCHOLARS PROGRAM

# IMPACT EVALUATION REPORT

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## Vision and Background

Seven years after the launch of the long term and holistic SIFF scholars program in Varthur, a semi urban area of Bangalore, an impact evaluation exercise was initiated to take a checkpoint on where the program and students are today vis-a-vis the broad vision and goals originally set out. The study encompasses a comprehensive review of the program from the point of view of multiple stakeholders, with the 50 Siff scholars at the centre of it. A detailed survey was conducted amongst the students, eliciting their feedback on a wide range of program initiatives and outcomes including academics, extra-curricular activities, social emotional learning, career guidance, health, financial and other avenues of support extended by the program to the students and their families. Interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators who have worked at the program as well as with parents of students who have been part of the program. The purpose of this evaluation is to have a mid-point review of the program, to understand what has gone well and what gaps and deficiencies exist which can be addressed through future interventions.

The SIFF Scholars program is the flagship program of the Singhal Iyer Family Foundation (SIFF) which was founded with the intention of making an impactful contribution in the areas of Education, Environment/Urban Rejuvenation, Music and Culture. It is a long term Scholarship cum Mentorship program that works with talented children from low socio-economic backgrounds over a 10+ year period. The entry point to the program is 6<sup>th</sup> grade and the program intends to guide and support the scholars through school and college till they complete their education and embark on their future paths as well rounded, sensitive and responsible adults. The program includes educational and financial support, while keeping learner well-being and their holistic development at the heart of guiding program actions and decisions at every stage.

The program was started in May 2016 and has added a batch of scholars each year for three years. Currently there are 50 children in the program across 10th, 11th and 12th grades. All these scholars will be first generation college goers. These students aspire to be scientists, doctors, public service professionals, teachers, social and business leaders. The vision of this program is to provide the right support and mentorship to the students over a long period of 10+ years with the belief that every one of these students has the potential to not only transform their own lives but also create a ripple effect to positively impact their families and the larger community.

The selection into the program is done through a multi-step holistic process that attempts to understand the child and family well. This enables the team to plan the learning and interventions for each child based on his/her needs and interests. There are both in-school and after school initiatives designed to offer a first rate academic education and also help every child to develop their creative and intrinsic potential. While different subjects like Mathematics, English, Science, & Social Studies are taught, the larger focus is on developing critical thinking, curiosity and effective language and communication skills.

The stated organizational belief and charter is as follows - *“We believe that each student is unique. Our teaching methodologies take this into account, whether we are using audio-visual learning, group activities or individual work that focuses on the needs of every child. With our team of committed teachers as well as experienced educators and individuals from different spheres of*

*work, we try to make every day engaging and stimulating for all our students. We have a special focus on social-emotional learning and development for each child. In the long-term, we aim to build an eco-system that identifies and nurtures students who can develop into capable individuals who could become change-makers within their communities and beyond.”*

The learning centre is located in a dedicated building, on a green campus, within the premises of a larger school in Varthur, a semi urban area in Bangalore. It has stimulating spaces for learning, art, music, drama, sport and group discussions. The program runs a full school day, five and a half days a week, following the standard calendar of Indian schools in Bangalore.

The program was designed to impact all aspects of the student’s development and well-being. The multitude of interventions can broadly be categorized into five areas - academics, extra-curricular activities, health & wellbeing, family circumstances & challenges and finally a variety of access, exposure, life skills and career planning interventions. Each of these areas is discussed in detail below, along with the student feedback on the impact and quality of these interventions at different phases of their journey as a SIFF Scholar.



Fig 1: SIFF scholars in their learning centre with teachers and staff

## Program Evaluation - Academics

The SIFF scholars program has academic excellence as one of the core components of its vision. At the time of admitting students into the program, the selection process used a general aptitude test covering Mathematics, Science and English to establish a baseline for the competency levels and gaps which the students entered with. Overall, while the students selected were in the top quartile of scores from amongst those who took the test, there was a significant gap observed in their scores compared to the national averages for reading, writing and mathematics at the sixth grade level. When this observation was discussed with the team, they pointed to the large gaps in their educational inputs at government and low income schools that are known to suffer from poor infrastructure, unqualified teachers and archaic practices and pedagogy. Adding to this gap is the low educational level of parents, most of whom have barely enough literacy and numeracy skills and education to be able to help their children with academics. The students are therefore left to their own devices and often end up dropping out or performing so poorly that the motivation to remain in the school system falls with every passing year.

With this baseline as a reality check for the academic excellence goal that the program had set out, the team had to devise a curriculum that would start slow, fill these gaps and then pick up the pace towards a higher level of academic rigor. The identified need was for the students to be exposed to a structured curriculum with skill based pedagogy. A combination of the CBSE (India's central board of secondary education) and Karnataka SSLC (the Karnataka state board curriculum) curriculum was hence adopted. As the teaching-learning process went on, it became clear that the classrooms had students across the learning spectrum from low to middle and high order. In order to ensure the learners would be competent to take standardized tests, subject-wise grade-level baseline assessments were conducted. The educators then collected the results and developed a rubric for their step-by-step progress based on frameworks like Blooms and Marzano and Kendall taxonomies. Each educator has incorporated their learnings and devised an approach that was best for their subject and individual learners. The plans were reworked every half year.

There was a shift in approach during the pandemic as classes moved to an online mode and curriculum had to be re-designed depending on available resources. Moving back to the offline mode brought up the issue of a slide in learner competencies. This demanded further adjustment of approaches. The subject approaches to teaching-learning are summarized below:

**English** - Curiosity and understanding learner needs based approach. Outlining learner needs, attitudes and competencies to create broad learner profiles. Centers around the learner and involving active participation from them. Challenges faced by learners and educators were also taken into consideration to understand limitations. Re-looking at language learning from the learners' point of view and designing a curriculum which incorporated specific learner needs and developed their overall communication abilities. Also, valuing and taking into consideration the learners' emotional and cultural realities more than their access to language and its grammar rules. Being tuned into the learner environment and incorporating pop culture references. Multiple techniques for monitoring and reviewing progress were also developed which ranged from observations in their natural and classroom environment to formal written assessments. Gamifying grammar concepts, use of logical connectors, focusing on common and individual error correction, progressive writing and reading challenges, organic speaking opportunities and using drills were

few of the techniques. Incorporating textbooks that adopt the constructive, spiral and integrated approach.

**Mathematics** - Incorporating an evidence-based approach and focusing on correcting misconceptions. Using the nationalized curriculum to set grade level standards and breaking down concepts into objectives mapped across the timeline of a school term. Curriculum was designed to include project-based learning. Multiple individual and group assessments were designed to periodically check for student understanding and their team work. Focus was on developing independent problem solving methods which could be extrapolated to real life situations. Differentiated practice worksheets, grouping students based on learner levels and learning styles. Setting individual and small group goals, making learner and educator thinking visible and including both conceptual and procedural techniques to enhance understanding and skills are drawn from the Common Core Standards for Mathematical Practice. Also taking care to consider learner mindsets. Developing 21st century skills through Mathematics. Setting up student-driven structures to monitor learner progress. Online resources like Khan academy were liberally used and once tablets were distributed to students, daily practice was encouraged to build up the missing skills.

**Science** - Scientific thinking and logical reasoning approach with hands-on experimentation. Educators attempted to provide step-by-step feedback in order to facilitate scientific thinking. Incorporating scientific vocabulary and writing techniques, breaking down lesson units to map to learner outcomes and tracking the same. Adopting an interdisciplinary method for certain topics in order for the learner to contextualize science units and observable occurrences. Developing the skills of attention to detail, planning, goal-setting and making students aware of the types of errors and accountable for correcting them. Using texts where the learner is encouraged to interpret, infer, evaluate and thus understand scientific concepts and nuances. Conceptual clarity using a hands-on approach to science was focused upon in the middle school years. In the second year of the program, a tinker lab was set up with the assistance of IIT Gandhinagar, one of the premier science and technology institutions of the country. Weekly sessions in the lab, class experiments and projects stimulated interest in science across grades. During the Covid lockdown this was one of the casualties the program suffered and several students missed this aspect of their science education immensely. Towards the 10<sup>th</sup> SSLC exam years, teaching became more exam focused and used video lectures and online resources in addition to regular classes.

**Social Science** - Understanding the universal and personal lens of social science approach. Developing skills that involve comprehension, interpretation, analysis of information. Other competency-focused areas have been fact checking and multiple response building. Facilitating discussions and team approach to problems. Adopting a flexibility in learning techniques which allowed for a diverse set of skills to be revealed. Linking concepts to world news and issues to increase the practical element of the subject. Student driven learning groups and projects which give the subject a hands on approach. Multidisciplinary techniques to widen scope across various disciplines like history, political science, sociology International collaboration with Berskole for cultural exchange, language, and social studies related themes and topics. Using textbooks which encourage the learner to contemplate, be involved in and develop proficiency in self and external reflection. The idea is that such an approach will contribute to the learner being an asset to the society with an ability to engage in productive social discourse. Social studies

includes History, Civics (Political Science) and Geography in middle school and adds Economics and Business Studies in the High school years. It is a complex and large subject with copious amounts of information to be understood and committed to memory for the examinations. A highly innovative approach was taken in the middle school years to rationalize the curriculum and do away with the rote based learning that is a norm at such schools. Instead, students were engaged in learning through storytelling, illustration projects, films and documentaries. Teachers encouraged students to think about historical and social issues and develop and voice their own opinions through classroom discussions and debates. Connecting the past to the present social, political and economic challenges was an engaging teaching tool used often. Students went from fearing the subject to getting interested and absorbed in it. The examination years 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade were challenging since this approach had to now coalesce into skilling up for the exams.

**Languages** - Learners are also expected to gain proficiency in two other Indian languages as part of their requirements. The standard languages chosen were Kannada - the official language of the state Karnataka and Hindi - one of the official languages of India. Kannada language learning followed the State board curricular requirements through the program. The teachers for Kannada were assigned by KK school within which the SIFF learning centre operates. The pedagogy and teaching style therefore differed significantly. Students had to adjust with this difference and it took some time before which they were able to acclimatize to it. The children of migrant laborers from the Eastern part of India (states of Bihar and Bengal) struggled considerably with Kannada. Towards the 10<sup>th</sup> board exam, the SIFF team enlisted extra tutorial help from the same teachers. Hindi was taught as the third language after English and Kannada. Again the KK school assigned the Hindi teacher and the State board curriculum was followed.

It is worthwhile to mention that this group of teachers was mentored by Alok and Chandrika Mathur, two senior educators from the Rishi valley school of the Krishnamurti Foundation of India. Over monthly sessions, teachers worked with these mentors on different aspects of curriculum, lesson planning, design of assessments and learning material. The sessions were also a space for individual and group reflection on their role as teachers, challenges that came up and progress made year on year. An annual retreat was conducted with these mentors before the start of a new academic year to put things in perspective and plan comprehensively.

### Summary of Academic outcomes

As of now, two batches of SIFF scholars have written the school leaving SSLC exam (10<sup>th</sup> grade equivalent) and graduated from the in-school program. The results of both batches have been in the overall range of 85-86% compared to the State average of around 65%. The results are summarized in the tables below:

#### SIFF Scholars BATCH 1 – Karnataka SSLC 2022 (10th board results)

Sr. No.	Student Name	English	Kannada	Hindi	Math	Science	Social Science	TOTAL
1	Abhi C. M	85	76	86	69	77	82	79
2	Asgar Pasha	90	77	80	74	82	100	84
3	Deepak Gurung	89	48	77	86	91	96	81
4	Deekshith P. S	96	97	98	88	83	96	93
5	Dinesh S.	71	61	82	85	91	94	80
6	Hemanth G.	83	74	82	85	76	84	81
7	Hemanth M. G	85	92	74	95	78	100	87
8	Kishan Kumar B. M	51	46	48	48	56	46	49
9	Nischay Kumar	90	98	96	100	98	100	97
10	Bindushree T. N	94	94	95	79	85	99	91
11	Dilruba Khatoun	68	49	100	86	79	89	78
12	Manasa M.	90	79	63	67	65	91	76
13	Manisha G. S	90	86	83	90	91	97	90
14	Riza Saniya	94	99	98	96	98	100	97
15	Sripriya S	92	90	88	75	86	83	86
16	Thulasi Ganavi P.	89	97	96	89	92	99	93
<b>CLASS AVERAGE %</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>84</b>



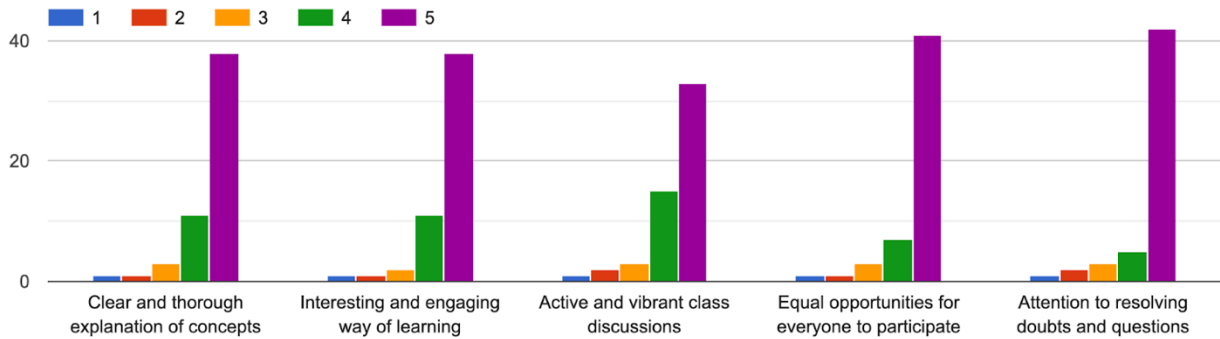
SIFF Scholars BATCH 2 – Karnataka SSLC 2023 (10th Board results)

Sr. No.	Student Name	English	Kannada	Hindi	Math	Science	Social Science	TOTAL
1	Abu Sufiyan Sheikh	89	81	98	92	90	98	91
2	Badiuddin Usman	82	84	91	98	85	89	88
3	Chandan S.	90	95	100	77	93	95	92
4	Dhananjay Nath	85	92	96	89	81	82	87
5	Gagan	86	90	81	94	77	78	84
6	Manoj V.	76	88	81	78	82	82	81
7	Shivakumar Nishad	70	63	64	77	68	64	68
8	Santhosh S.	87	97	99	92	71	88	89
9	Amrutha	90	98	98	81	88	86	90
10	Anshukumari Sharma	89	53	78	49	62	89	71
11	Bhavani	73	95	92	68	66	82	79
12	Bhoomika	95	98	98	92	89	94	94
13	Bipasha Khatoon	90	72	86	67	78	81	79
14	Darshini S.	98	99	99	84	81	88	92
15	Deepa	79	80	85	52	55	66	70
16	Nandini S.	96	99	91	88	94	96	94
17	Nasreen	98	97	96	86	91	96	94
18	Sumaiyya Mariyam	91	92	100	87	93	95	93
19	Vaishnavi B. S	94	95	90	87	88	92	91
<b>CLASS AVERAGE %</b>		<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>86</b>
All figures are percentages								

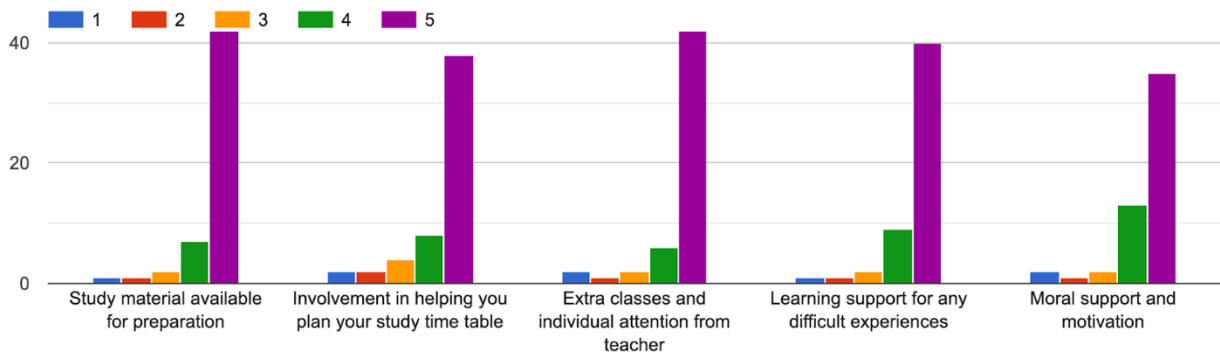
As of the time of this report, the third batch of students is preparing to sit their SSLC exams in March 2024.

## Student feedback – Academics

12. How effective did you find your classroom experience?



13. How effective was the support for your exam preparation and any academic challenges you faced?



**Reflect on your academic journey during 6-10th grade at SIFF Scholars and where you are today. Mention a time where you faced an academic challenge and overcame it.**

“My academic journey from 6-10 was really great. I had difficulty in my studies during lockdown from 8-9 grade, from 10 I started improving slowly bit by bit. All my teachers they helped me a lot, they helped in time management, helped me in making a proper time table, motivated me. In the end of the year I got pretty good marks in my board exam and I'm really really happy how SIFF teachers helped me in many things..”

“During my 10th boards I was very weak at maths, my teacher helped me by providing study tips, tricks and material which made me score more than 70% in the subject.”

"My journey initially was uncomfortable with all unknown people..but then gradually i really got happy with the people i was. I have improved in speaking skills, confidence and also knowledge wise not only in academic knowledge about the world also has increased. One time when i faced a lot of difficulty in academics was in 9th because before 9th it was covid time and i didn't give importance to 8th. Then suddenly when i came to 9th everything was new to me but then i improved by studying everyday and making plans with my teacher."

"In the beginning of my journey in SIFF it was quite a new experience than my previous school because in my previous school it was all mugging up and what they give in the cw's or revision the same would come in the exam. But in SIFF it was all different they not only focus on studies but also we as a person and how are developing. This is not done in most of the schools but only in SIFF. In the schools i know they mainly focus on academics but in SIFF they focus on developing the new skills we have and how can we find out what are our new skills and they give many opportunities to learn more skills too. Hence this foundation is very fascinating to me. They helped me in academic studies and also in developing other skills other than studies."

"In 5th, I didn't know good english and was bad in writing and speaking mostly I was afraid of talking in front of people, also afraid of teachers. After coming here in this 4 to 5 years everything just changed now I was thinking about what will I should become and now I am not at all afraid of speaking up , also not afraid of talking to teachers."

**Reflecting on your academic journey during 6-10th grade at SIFF Scholars, mention a time where you wish you had received better support.**

"When I reflect on my academic journey at SIFF, I realize that I could have used better support during Grade 7. As everything was online, I felt a bit disconnected from my studies. However, despite these challenges, I acknowledge that SIFF did provide some support that ultimately helped me improve."

"In 8th grade when we suddenly came back to offline mode of teaching it was difficult to adjust to the change. I think at that time, during the exam times it was difficult because of all the changes, so I wish I had received better support there."

"Every time I fell down.. there was someone from the organisation to lift me up 😊 .. this was only because I was very confident and had lot of trust on my teachers and other staff members.. the trust they built in us is what made us share any kinda problem with them !!!"

"One area where I struggled was with the Kannada language, even though it wasn't a subject taught by SIFF teachers. I wished there had been some form of support or resources available to help us. It could have been helpful to have additional tutoring or language support classes to help us."

## Program Evaluation - Extracurricular activities

The intent at SIFF is to give the learners an opportunity to explore areas of interest beyond the classroom. Care was taken to ensure each student had access to at least one sport and extracurricular activity. Team and individual opportunities were made available according to the learners' preferences. Although logistics interfered with accommodating specific interests, a variety of interventions were put together across disciplines by partnering with like-minded organizations. Learners were encouraged to participate and build skill as per their inclination. These interventions provided the organization with the unique opportunity of partnering with other spaces that worked to take the intervention beyond the skill. A few of the interventions offered included:

### Sports Interventions

- Just for Kicks - An initiative under the global non-profit organization Enabling Leadership, Just for Kicks allowed students to have experiences and opportunities to learn leadership and life-skills first-hand through the medium of football (soccer). The Play curriculum is built on the four pillars of modern football & grassroots development: technical skill, psycho-social dynamics, physical ability and life-skills. Students created their own team called the SIFF Panthers and played tournaments through the year. Girls participated equally, which is rare in these school environments. JFK coaches came to the school every week to conduct training sessions. Beyond sports, there was a distinct shift in inter-personal skills and attitudes that was noticed by the teachers. Coming together as a team drawn from across 3 batches of SIFF scholars also cemented a special bond between these students.
- Ultimate Frisbee - A non contact sport, this option was chosen for the learners who struggled with contact and aggression. The skills focused on teamwork and individual skill work with increased awareness of the abilities and limitations of the body and mind. It was another approach to the team sports space.
- Badminton - This intervention was provided via a tie up with the Yeshas Sports Academy that operates in Varthur - near the school space. Interested students would sign up and attend bi-weekly classes. The program coordinator would follow up with the facilitators to get feedback on the student's skill level, attendance, discipline and any such relevant information.
- Taekwondo - Learners interested in individual fitness training and centering of the mind and body signed up for taekwondo. The discipline was facilitated by Mr. Vijay, a Black Belt instructor, conducting classes out of the school space. Focus was paid on individual learner progress in the skill and in their overall stamina, energy levels and attitudes.

- Others - Post the pandemic, there were restrictions on getting facilitators to the school space. Sports engagements involved signing up students with Sports academies and students heading to a space outside school to continue these interventions. For instance, a learner interested in cricket signed up with Gopalan Academy of Sports for training. Another learner interested in football signed up for a summer coaching program, yet another student who was interested in Martial Arts was enrolled in a Kickboxing and Muay Thai program at Eight Limbs where their instructors included world champions in the sport.

### Arts, music and other interventions

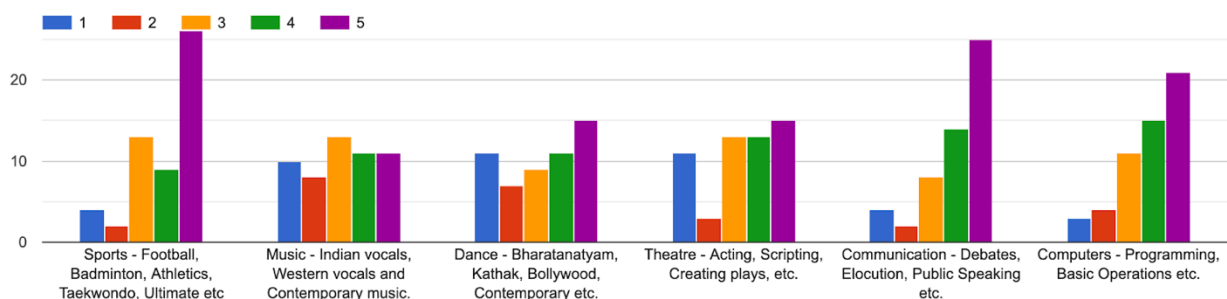
- Music - Interested learners have enrolled in Hindustani, Western and Carnatic Vocals with facilitators outside the school space. A significant number of learners make use of the online learning platform Young Artiste for the same.
- Dance - Interested learners have enrolled in Indian classical (Bharatnatyam and Kathak), Bollywood and contemporary dance forms with academies like Hum and Strum and online learning platforms like Young Artiste.
- Instruments - Interested learners are enrolled in learning the keyboard via online classes with Young Artiste.
- Art - Facilitator Neera trained small groups of interested learners in various approaches to art and fine art. Learners interested in pursuing careers in design were also guided to create portfolios and enroll in structured skill-development programs with organizations like Konsult Art Academy.
- Communication and verbal skill enhancement - Managing Trustee conducted elocution and public speaking classes in which learners would work on individual speaking pieces and develop it through the academic year. These classes culminated in a contest at the end of the academic year. Other interventions included debate competitions and shorter workshops conducted as part of an outreach program by students of The International School, Bangalore.
- Computer classes - With the incorporation of technology in every sphere of learning, it was imperative to train our learners in the basics on computer usage and expose them to the possibilities outside the mere day-to-day. A partnership with the organization - Code to Enhance Learning saw the design of a fruitful two-year program in basic and advanced computer education conducted online. Students learned the basics of Microsoft Application and moved onto advanced concepts in html, robotics and coding.

## Field Trips and educational tours

- Field Trips - Partnership with Intach helped learners embark on heritage walks around the city they lived in. They also visited various other landmarks around the city of Bengaluru. This helped to add a practical element to the academics.
- Neev Literature Festival - Learners participated in the annual Literature Festival conducted at Neev Academy. They interacted with children and young adult authors, participated in discussion panels and were part of the workshops.
- Students attended a few plays at Chowdiah and Jagriti theaters. They interacted with the playwright of the play “Square root of a sonnet” to understand the process behind the writing of the play.

## Student feedback - Extracurricular activities

15. How effective did you find your extra curricular activities?



Reflecting on your experience with extracurricular activities at SIFF, what activity did you enjoy participating in? Elaborate on how the activity benefitted you.

“Physical activities like football,dance etc gave me the pleasure of having my stamina exhausted and so on. Just having run and chasin after a ball with my fellow teammates and opponents when we could lose the ball felt heavenly!! Movin my body without any restrictions is all i wanted and I really got that!! During debates and public speaking activities the thing that I enjoyed most was that I got the attention of all the people at that instant when I was speaking. It satisfied my desires to get attentions. Computer programming and others created a world for me which I want to now conquer!!”

“Based on my experience with extracurricular activities at SIFF, I had an enjoyable time managing events and participating in the SIFF Young Artiste Bollywood Dance. Exploring new dance moves and

styles was particularly exciting. Additionally, I also found the creative writing and class debates to be engaging and enjoyable.”

“I enjoyed participating in Frisbee classes. It was really a wonderful experience. There were lot of options to engage in. Music, Dance, Theater classes, Football etc. Currently Iam engaged in Keyboard classes. And each class of it is really good. I had so much fun while attending the classes of bollyfitness as well as keyboard classes. There’s always so much to learn. I personally enjoyed Frisbee classes. The coach was really friendly and I loved the rules of the game and the way it is played.”

Based on your experience with extracurricular activities at SIFF, how could your experience have been better?

“Extracurricular activities would've been much better and I really mean it when I say, it would've great if we had more days in a week for them. I wanted to participate in all of the activities if possible. Then we would have had different activities each day of the week!!! I bet this was once a dream for all of my people.”

“Currently in 10th grade,the extracurricular activities are conducted online. I think it would have been better and engaging if it was offline. Other than that everything good”

“As I am a big fan of art and crafts . I felt that there should be a art class for our grade also . Which would be more fun to me atleast ...”

“Playing out door with teachers. 10th standard has been so boring only study study. That should be a time will we spend half in our outside.”

“I wish that debate classes and theatre classes continued, I had a great time. Also, taekwondo could have continued, only if we were not hit by the pandemic, and that we recieved our taekwondo uniforms and belts.”

## Program Evaluation - Health and wellbeing

Early in the program, the team realized that the students need to specifically be made more aware of how to take care of their own health. Nutritional deficiencies were common – anemia amongst girls, vitamins and mineral deficiencies were seen across the group. Low immunity characterized student health – frequent absences due to colds and coughs, viral fever, headaches and body aches. Poor sleeping habits, late night TV watching and mobile phone addiction added to the challenge. Five areas of health and wellbeing were identified and addressed as core needs?:

- Information sessions on health and nutrition, good sleep and exercise habits – these were held in the classroom by multiple teachers as a part of their regular conversations.

- Regular check-ins with students on absences related to poor health. Teachers often followed up with parents and discussed these cases with a view to pointing them in the right direction.
- Setting up doctor appointments for longer illnesses like typhoid and dengue – the team connected to experienced pediatricians for second opinions on complex health situations and hospitalizations.
- Sexual health awareness – conducted every year by Enfold - an organization that specializes in sex education. Parent sessions were included to help parents understand how to talk to their children about these questions openly and knowledgeably.
- Social-emotional education – formed an important part of this program right from the beginning. Dr Kakli, an experienced child and adolescent psychologist helped the team right from the outset to baseline the social and emotional state and needs of the students. With this baseline established, a plan was drawn up to include a team of counselors to work with the students and offer group and individual sessions as needed. This team also held sessions over the academic year with the teacher group to help them understand the area of adolescent development and psychology. Teachers were thus better equipped to deal with the day to day issues that came up in classrooms. More complex cases were discussed with the counselors and interventions were planned to address them in an effective manner. During the Covid lockdown year when learning moved online, the teachers took on the role of conducting group sessions for the students to hold a space for safe expression. Many students suffered the lock down in extremely cramped living spaces and the need for connection was intense in this period.

Health and well-being of the learners was always considered as utmost priority. Throughout their time in school periodic interventions were employed in a large-group and on an individual requirement basis. One of the primary interventions in this area included support for the overall health of the scholar and their immediate family. The educator team provided one-on-one mentorship to the scholars where they would periodically check-in to be acquainted with any health related issues faced by the scholar or their family. This ensured that timely aid and assistance could be provided as needed. Once a situation was identified, the team would chart out a course for aid and advice depending on what was required. The organization has also proactively arranged for medical check ups of students where parents didn't have the means and took care of all medical expenses. Support included and was not limited to financial aid for medical emergencies. Few other areas of support included:

- Covering expenses for diagnostic tests and follow up assistance for learning and neurodevelopmental issues like dyslexia and ADHD.
- Partnering with Enfold, an organization that envisions all children living in safe environments with dignity and safety, to conduct sessions on sexuality and personal safety.
- Adhering to age-specific vaccination and other such practices that aimed at bettering child immunity.

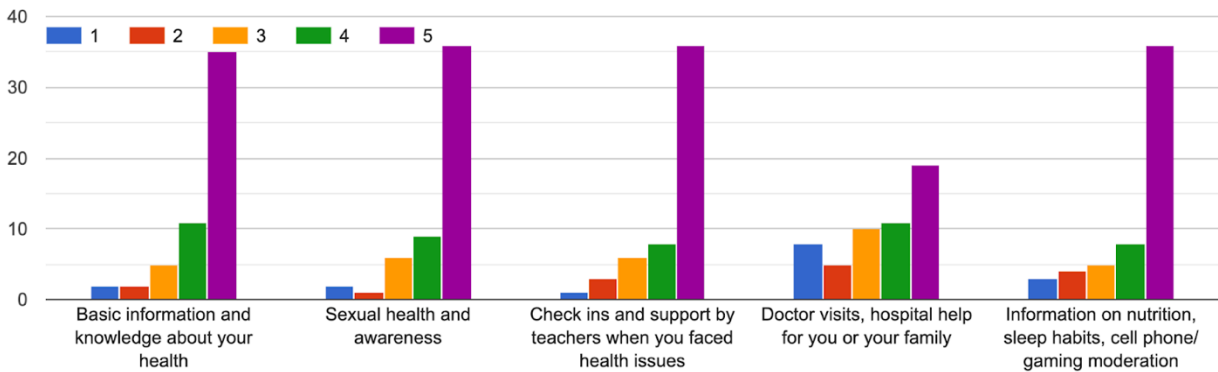


- Proactive arrangements for appointments with specialists and periodic follow up with the learner and their family to check on the need and/or progress.
- Tie ups with RxDx Clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide medical assistance to families in need.

Mental health and social emotional development is an area Siff strongly believes is essential to be catered to. The team has worked extensively with counselors like Seema Mullick and Parul Soni who, under the supervision of Dr. Kakli Gupta, conducted group sessions with the learners. The counselor team also trained the educator team at SIFF on understanding child and adolescent psychology. They supervised the mentorship program with the aim to empower the team to provide scholars with timely guidance and appropriate assistance in issues surrounding the learners’ lives. Educators were supervised by the counselors. During the pandemic the educators worked closely with the counselors to design safe and engaging Socio-Emotional Learning spaces online so that learners could continue to express and interact without interruption. On a need basis, learners have also been referred for individual counseling sessions with other psychologists training under Dr. Kakli Gupta. The school also has an experienced psychologist who has worked extensively with children and teenagers, Meena Iyer, visiting weekly for individual counseling sessions at school.

### Student feedback - Health and well-being

17. How effective did you find the support towards your health and well being



Write about a time that you received support from the SIFF Scholars Program when faced with a difficult health situation.

“I have received many times support regarding my health and also my families health. . From my end in school whenever I felt any health issues and I said to any of the teachers . They would comfort me and give medicines if needed.”

“There was a time recently in my life, it was really tough for me and my family where my mom was balmed for something that she didn't even do. So at that time siff held and there were a lot of emotions

flowing in me they gathered me and stood beside me always . At that particular time siff even introduced us to Bembla. For this I will forever be thankful to siff”

“In 6th grade and in 9th grade I was suffering from dengue and typhoid fever. I wasn't able to come to school for a 5 to 6 days. The teachers were really helpful at that time. They reached out to my parents asked about my health. And when I came back to school I had a lot of topics to cover and a lot of incomplete work. Teachers helped me to understand all the topics I have missed that and clarified all my doubts. That was really helpful for me.”

“In tenth grade, I received counseling sessions, it helped me quite a lot with my mental health well-being.”

“When my dad passed away I was so low and depressed that is when SIFF stood with me and helped me overcome all those things. I started getting counselling classes from Meena Ma'am I can say she is the bestest I have ever met. Within 2 classes she literally brought a change in me. Now how much ever strong I am mentally and all the decisions I take by myself is all because of her. Am so grateful for her.”

Write about a time you wished there had been better support from the SIFF Scholars Program when faced with a difficult health situation.

“When I was in the 7th standard I remember I had a pretty big cut in my left leg after tripping and falling in a 100m race . That day I really needed some assistance from SIFF as I didn't receive any major support from KK school as they had ran out of first aid kits . SIFF wasn't really operating that day. Hence, I feel like SIFF should have operated that day.”

“No they were the first to approach us and give the best support. Each teacher here at siff are so sympathetic and caring.”

## Program Evaluation - Family circumstances and challenges

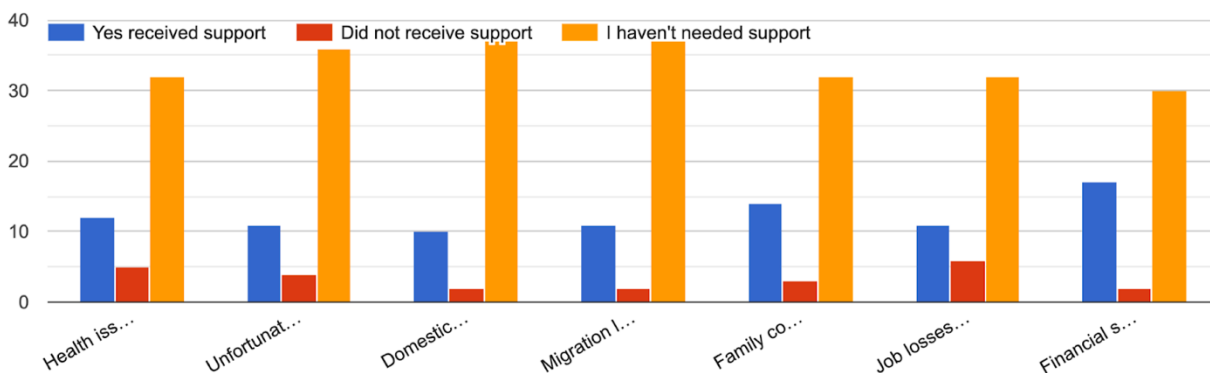
The SIFF Scholars Program has offered support during challenges faced by the scholars and their families. During the lockdown due to the pandemic, several of the scholars' family members had lost their jobs. The scholarship program attempted to provide employment opportunities for the same. Financial aid to assist with housing, day-to-day expenses and medical expenses were provided on a timely basis. For domestic issues that came up individually, the program connected the family with organizations that worked in the relevant field e.g. Bembla - an organization that works with women and child welfare and Enfold - an organization that works with sensitizing communities to issues around personal safety and schools for continued education of our scholars' siblings. The support also extended to connecting the families with specialists and assisting with the expenses of various medical issues.

Special family circumstances include health problems faced by family members, accidents, job loss, domestic violence, migration due to family pressures etc. There were a host of such issues in different families over the course of the program. In the early stages, the program team took a

direct and personal interest in each of these situations. They were involved in supporting medical situations requiring surgery, resolving family conflicts and being available to the students and parents at all times. Over time, the team came to an understanding of what would be a more sustainable way to provide support – it was more sustainable to enable these families to take more ownership of their own problems rather than dole out support at every instance. There was a learning curve here with the team also being realistic about how far they could intervene in family situations. Two students dropped out of the program due to extenuating family circumstances.

## Student feedback - Family circumstances and challenges

19. Please check the special family circumstances during which you received support from the SIFF scholars program?



Please elaborate on the situations/occasions related to family circumstances and challenges where you received support from the SIFF scholars program

“Siff program have support us when we didn't have enough money for my father's surgery.I am very grateful and thankful to you all for this.”

“During the lockdown, the monthly income of the family was very less. The program took effort to make sure we were financially well. Called and asked about the well being. They reduced the school fee. Which was helpful during those times”

“During lockdown, we didn't have enough money to pay for the medical fees of my mother. SIFF helped us financially.”

“As my father is an auto driver and heart patient too.The income which he earns was not sufficient to manage for the educational expenses for both my brother and for me.The income was only sufficient for the health,and for other house expenses.So that's the time when I received financial support from

SIFF which provided me with a good education and a very good college to learn and this made my parents relief.”

“So recently My mother met with an accident.I was totally down.After having a talk with my teachers made me feel better.they used to check with me every day how I and my mother is doing..That’s what made feel better.. Thier words mean a lot to me..Also My teachers had visited to the hospital to see ma’s condition.I am glad.”

“There was a fight happeneing in my home where I was not able concentrate on studies or any other things !! Rachana ma'am sat with me and talked about it every week ! I was comfortable and I was sharing my thoughts to ma'am ! And they had appointed another teacher for conversations !! There also I had expressed my feelings and thoughts running in my mind !! Because of this I mind was relef and I was able to concentrate on studies!”

“During COVID-19 we had settled in our native place permanently. Being away from school we started looking for other school but we had financial difficulties, we went as far as looking for a Bengali medium school. At last we decided to go with an English medium, after the formal procedures with admission we thought to we'll go with the flow of fate. That is when SIFF approached us to support and back me up financially regarding my school fees. That was an incredible help for me and my family.”

“My family has received plentiful support from SIFF such as school fees , in the lockdown some financial support and now also for fees there is a full support . I personally received support from teachers also whenever I had some issues I had conversation and sort out . Counselling was best part and more support that I have received.”

Please elaborate on the situations related to family circumstances and challenges where you wish you had received better support from the SIFF scholars program

“I just wished that the teachers asked me about my family and problems because parents hesitate to say their problems of what will others think.”

“I am very grateful to SIFF for whatever support they have provided me till now.As my mother is a house wife and my father is the only person who has to look after everything in the house with his health issues,but sometimes when the condition of our house get worse in financial wise my parents couldn't afford the school expenses for my brother and me. But I received support from SIFF but my parents thought that they'll put my brother to some government schools because they can't afford money.so that's when I wished that it was nice even if my brother had got a support like me from the SIFF.”

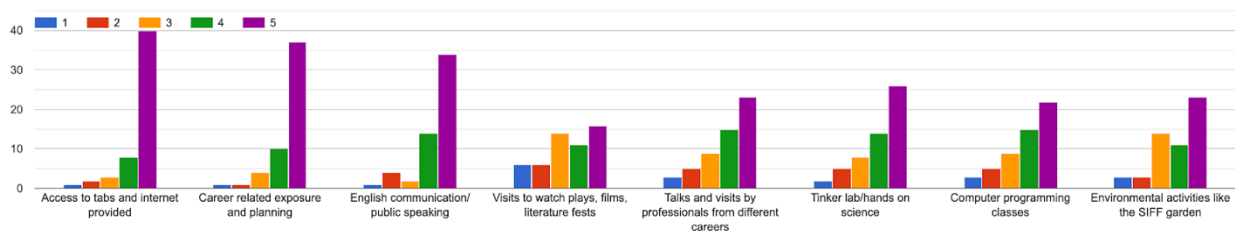
“I don't know exactly but it would be my parents circumstances since I have a stepmom too it was difficult to find peace sometimes most of the time I just wanted to run way from them but again I don't have anywhere to go and I need to continue my education but I think now I can do it since I'm old enough . Also I couldn't say to anyone what I was going through as a kid and keeping that smiley face always.”

## Program Evaluation - Access, exposure, career planning and life skills

One of the flagship components of the SIFF Scholarship program was one-on-one mentorship and career guidance. The initial couple of years of the academic program focussed on providing exposure to various careers and the skills needed to identify one's own area of interest. Speakers across various fields in traditional and new-age careers were invited to speak and learners were encouraged to interact and get first-hand knowledge of the fields they were curious about. Every educator mentored a group of learners in their field of expertise. In grade 8, learners deep-dived into their fields of their interests. Learners were encouraged to explore broad areas instead of specific careers. Once in-depth research was conducted, learners picked at least 3 careers and explored the paths that led them to it. Grades 9 and 10 were spent in one-on-one discussions with a dedicated career counsellor who took their aptitude, skill sets and interests into consideration before mentoring the learners to make subject choices.

### Student feedback - access, exposure, career planning and life skills

21. How effective did you find the program across different aspects related to facilities, exposure, life skills and career planning.



### Elaborate on which of the above experiences had the most impact or benefitted you the most.

"The Tinker lab classes benefited me a lot. In that I had the freedom to create anything or test an experiment by doing it myself. I even got to know about many machines and parts. I even enjoyed this a lot."

"I liked the public speaking so much. It made me improve in my speaking skills and also built up my confidence and self belief."

"I think meeting people from various careers. It helped me to understand how their lives are what are the difficulties they face in those careers. It helped to understand what I would like to do what not."

"The career related exposure and planning had benefitted me the most. There are teachers who clarify our doubts related to career. I had confusion of what I will be taking up in 11th and 12th but talking to them made it so much easier. And I got a idea of what my future would look like and what I would be studying."

"Access of tabs and provided internet."

During the difficult time of the journey, i.e.lockdown, siff provided a tab for the online classes when my parents couldn't afford buying 2 phones for both my brother and me. Also they provided internet which cut down the financial problem and helped save small amounts to go through that hard time."

"Computer programming class benefited me. I was so much interested in doing programs and then I decided I want to do something which I'm enjoying after my 10."

**Elaborate on which of the above experiences could have been improved and in what way.**

"I think that the environment programme should be conducted more . Since it was conducted only once or twice . It would have been more nice and fun if it was more."

"Plays, literature things could have been more often. For whenever they took place, they were brilliant."

"The computer classes if it was offline it could have been better because in online classes we faced too much network issue that's the only thing could happen better."

"Science labs - there should have been at least single class for science lab period for experiments."

"We could have done some more environmental activities such as planting saplings , working towards to look more good at the same time cleaning and nurturing the garden."

## Financial analysis

The Table below summarizes Program cost for each year from 2016 to 2023. On an average, Rs 1,50,000 to 2,50,000 per year was spent on each student. This is comparable to the educational costs of a mid to high income school in the city of Bangalore. The costs of higher education are higher and the increase in per student cost in 2021-22 and 2022-23 reflects the move of the first two batches into pre university. This is expected to further increase when the first batch of SIFF scholars graduates from 12th grade in May 2024 and moves into University.

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>No of students</b>	<b>Tuition cost</b>	<b>Program cost - direct</b>	<b>General admin cost</b>	<b>Total cost</b>	<b>Cost per student</b>
<i>2016-17</i>	-	<i>74,426</i>	<i>4,40,645</i>	<i>6,59,549</i>	<i>11,74,620</i>	<i>Pre program</i>
<i>2017-18</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>15,24,865</i>	<i>12,58,057</i>	<i>8,44,807</i>	<i>36,27,748</i>	<i>1,90,934</i>
<i>2018-19</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>15,88,655</i>	<i>22,69,423</i>	<i>9,11,027</i>	<i>47,69,143</i>	<i>1,25,504</i>
<i>2019-20</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>20,55,893</i>	<i>38,39,500</i>	<i>15,76,712</i>	<i>74,72,158</i>	<i>1,40,984</i>
<i>2020-21</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>18,12,409</i>	<i>37,65,682</i>	<i>12,99,445</i>	<i>68,77,588</i>	<i>1,32,261</i>
<i>2021-22</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>28,16,776</i>	<i>53,81,938</i>	<i>16,16,815</i>	<i>98,15,579</i>	<i>1,96,312</i>
<i>2022-23</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>58,58,920</i>	<i>48,50,877</i>	<i>23,27,668</i>	<i>1,30,37,515</i>	<i>2,60,750</i>
<i>All costs in INR (Rs.)</i>						

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This impact evaluation exercise was conducted with the objective of taking a midpoint review of the program which extends over a 10-15 year period with the development and growth of the incoming cohorts of students at the heart of it. At the end of 7 years, the following key milestones have been achieved:

- 2 batches of students (a total of 35 students) have graduated successfully from the in-school program which runs from 6th to 10th grades with the Karnataka SSLC board exam conducted at the end of it.
- Academically there is significant growth from the entry point to the 10th board stage where Batch 1 cohort has an average class percentage of 84% and Batch 2 cohort has graduated with an average class percentage of 86%. This is anything from 10-20% percentage points higher than the average achieved at low income government and private schools in the same city.
- 6 students from Batch 1 and 8 students from Batch 2 scored above 90% at meritorious levels.
- Batch 1 and 2 students have successfully made the transition to good quality pre university institutions in Bangalore.

The academic rigor of the program is evidenced by the use of multi pronged strategies, lesson plans, resources, extra classes, individualized interventions, carefully developed assessments, feedback and exam specific mentorship throughout the program. Students have rated the quality of the classroom experience as well as the support for exam preparation largely at 4-5 on a scale of 5. There are several mentions of extensive help from teachers for problems faced and a mix of academic and world knowledge having been gained through interesting science classes, big improvements in English, Mathematics and Social science. There are a few mentions of gaps in the online Covid years where students have felt disconnected at times. There is also a request to include Kannada and Hindi language teaching which was outsourced during this period.

Outside the classroom there were multiple opportunities to play sports and participate in learning music, drama and public speaking. There is room for more fine art and visual aesthetics to be developed, which is expressed by several students. Girls played and enjoyed football equally which is a rare occurrence in low income schools in India. Among sports interventions, JFK football league matches were much loved and looked forward to. Ultimate frisbee and Taekwondo also had enthusiastic learners. Post the pandemic, the restrictions on getting coaches to school and the exam pressure made students miss these sports dearly. Field trips and educational tours were much appreciated and there is a request to make them more frequent. Computer and programming classes have been conducted well. Students have asked for extracurricular activities every day of the week. Access to internet and tabs has been very useful to students as they studied online through Covid and beyond.



Health and well-being has been a key area of the program. Regular check-ins by teachers have been mentioned and appreciated by many students, during and outside the pandemic years. Setting up doctor appointments, taking students to hospital, sexual health awareness are recalled by several students as having been invaluable. Social-emotional education and support was built into the design of this program right from the beginning. Students mention the counselling support received during tough times. The program team prioritized lesser known areas such as learning difficulties and dyslexia. The ability to translate those into specific accommodations in school is still being developed. Three students have each lost a parent in this period and have received counselling support for extended periods. The program also attempted to help the families of these students during different challenges like job losses, migration back to their villages and medical expenses and hospitalization. Career development activities from 8th to 10th grade have been helpful to students in developing a clearer idea of the career paths available and suitable to their interest and ambition. Meeting professionals from different careers is mentioned by students as a highly productive experience.

The aim of the program to have a holistic impact on the student has been met to a large extent in a seven year period which included the Covid pandemic and brought many challenges to the fore. The financial support at such times has smoothed the way out, but equally the motivation of the team of teachers to stay connected with each student and bring the right intervention required at that moment has made this holistic achievement possible. A statement by one of the students summarizes it best:

*“Every time I fell down, there was someone from the organization to lift me up. The trust they built in us made us share any kind of problem with them.”*

As this program moves into the second phase of its development, the core relationships built with much care and concern, will hold the students and teachers in good stead. The future path of the program is bright and full of possibility.