

Developing confidence through sporting activity: An aspiring doctor's case study

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Satya Sai school, located within Dum Duma slum in Bhubaneswar, was a new centre part of the Community Sports Program (CSP) in 2017. It was founded by Ashok Jena in 1978 and is a non-government school with 450 students (Class 1-8), from underprivileged backgrounds, whose parents are generally skilled or unskilled

labourers, while others run small businesses within the nearby slum community of Dum Duma.

Subhashree Swain is a 13-year-old girl from Class 8, in her final year at the school. She is near the top of her class, in terms of exam scores, for every subject, and her average total score of 92% puts her in the top 5% among all 618 children on the Community Sports Program.

Her ability is matched by her ambition. When asked about her plans for the future, her reply is immediate and adamant. “*Doctor*”. A simple yet firm statement of intent. Encouragingly, given the tendency for female ambition to be stifled by social and familial forces, her mother, Sulachana Swain, gives exactly the same answer to the question, hoping that her daughter will go on to become a doctor in the future.

But even for a girl at the top of her class, the CSP sessions have had an impact. Subhashree says

the games have helped her “*improve my concentration, helped with my studies and improved my memory power*”, in addition to making her more physically fit. Her mother also claims that her behaviour has improved in recent months, in that she has become more active and also more respectful. But the biggest change seems to have been in Subhashree’s attitude towards the opposite gender. She relates that, before the sessions began, she would not even touch any of the boys in her class. “*But now that we have been playing in mixed groups, my thinking has changed and now I am much more comfortable around boys,*” she says.



Subhashree outside the school gates



Subhashree with her mother, Sulachana

Her teacher, Lalat Kumar Maharana, elaborates on this extraordinary change in her attitude towards the opposite gender, which seems to have affected many of the Satya Sai children on the CSP. *“Before the sessions started the classroom was always divided into two parts, girls and boys separate,”* he says. *“Now they are one class, they have become whole through the sessions.”*

Beyond the very welcome breaking down of barriers between the genders, Mr Maharana says he has also seen an improvement in Subhashree, who he calls a very “industrious and studious” child. He concurs with the idea that she now seems to concentrate even more since the start of the sessions, but says the biggest change has



Answering a question from coach Rajesh

Subhashree’s next step after completing at Satya Sai School will likely be to attend the nearby Government High School, which is most common among strong students at the school, and then on to study medicine. A career in medicine will take a lot of hard work and Subhashree will face a lot of challenges, particularly given her background from Dum Duma slum. But it is hoped that, when faced with these challenges she will not feel fear and instead will remember ‘*I can do this*’.



Subhashree’s teacher, Lalat Kumar Maharana

been in her level of confidence. The

teacher says that whenever she is faced with a tough

problem, *“she now says ‘I can do this’, whereas before she always seemed unsure”*. Subhashree herself believes the games have helped her overcome some of her fear and insecurity over her own abilities. *“When I first started playing the games, I felt fear. But slowly these games have helped improve my confidence and now I no longer feel fear before the games,”* she says.

PSD coach Bhaktamohan Swain says he has also noticed a change in Subhashree since the start of the sessions. *“At the start of the program she would not play with the boys, but now she is playing comfortably. She is also now confident enough to ask the coaches questions if she doesn’t understand a game, which she did not do at the start of the program.”*

