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Sriram Ayer helps to make the lives of children from marginalised communities better through his organisation NalandaWay. He gives them a chance to express themselves either through theatre or by making a film. Nanditha Suresh meets this social worker to find out more



Sriram Ayer

East Side Story, supported by UNICEF, a group of children made short films with a strong social message.

One can only imagine the kind of impact these films made by children, who had seen so much in so little time, must have made. In fact, after the screening of these short films in Krishnagiri district, there were major reforms particularly, concerning the child labourers in the area. "We managed to initiate a programme to get the child labourers to go through a proper schooling and orient them to normal living. This was a milestone for NalandaWay," claims a very proud Sriram.

If Sriram is not putting the lives of children back on track, he just packs his bags and travels. "I am not much of an extrovert, I like quiet time to myself to read or ponder about things," he says. "I love aimless travel; I just pack my bags when I feel like, travel and spend time with myself and unwind," he adds.

Sriram Ayer is a self-confessed movie maniac and has been inspired by movies like *American Beauty*, *Patch Adams*, *15 Park Avenue*, *Sila nerangalil sila manithargal* and *Anbe Sivame*. "Something about these movies move me," he says. The love for movies is certainly reflected in his work to empower children.

There's no better medium for children to reach out to people than film, he believes. "It hits the people hard," he says grimly. "This is just the beginning, there are better things yet to come," he promises, intent on his dream to bring light into the lives of children of a lesser god.

Chalking a path for children

A small and to some, an insignificant incident drastically changed the life of Sriram Ayer nearly four years ago. He recounts in an interview to Yes, "When I was working for a software company, a little boy walked in selling incense sticks. I learnt from him that he helps his father, who makes the sticks, to sell them after school. The next day I quit my job and decided to work for a goal. I simply wanted to bridge the gap between the marginalised and the affluent."

That was how NalandaWay Foundation, an organisation to help children from marginalised communities fight their problems and achieve better things in life, was born in 2003. Moreover, in

his efforts to make children's lives better, the 30-year-old, spirited Sriram does not believe that one should help by doling out money. "I have always believed in some kind of a platform where the children from the

plight of the children after the incident first-hand was something else," adds Sriram.

NalandaWay helps children through a mentoring programme where volunteers talk to them, hear their problems and help them on a



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marginalised communities can be supported not just through money," he says.

In any disaster, Sriram feels that it is the children who get affected the most. For example during the Gujarat riots, he saw that children had been raped and orphaned. "It was sad to see the damage on television and read it in the newspapers but to see the

one-to-one basis. The organisation also trains the children in theatre, journalism, scripting and film-making. In this way, the children are able to tell their stories or their innermost thoughts. This unique venture providing marginalised children a voice through different media made people sit up. That was how NalandaWay's second project took off. In this project, called