

Work of Reshma Valliappan with The Red Door (TRD)

In the past 2 years I've been working directly with many kids and young adults here in school and colleges and a lot of the boys who fall under all kinds of diagnosis such as ADHD, seeing ghost, paranoia, anxiety, sociopaths, anxiety, voice hearers, depression (and some girls) have all found their ways through our simple methods of holding space for each other and the self that is taught through our program.

They've been able to support each other and just themselves in their own self-care since the kids come from single house rooms where there is no such space or toilets and their large families live in the same space where noise levels are so loud there is no difference between voices and noises for them.

Our TRD club follows a simple concept of holding space where even if someone has a problem with another kid who has caused a lot of distress such as sexual assault - they are able to hold their own spaces and those of others by helping them not react and feed into the other person's energy. So our alternative method here is understanding energies, reactions and in gaining awareness they are able to naturally change their energy of the room and the person in context.

This is specifically to our school work since it bears a lot of weightage in early interventions in mental health as these kids parents get humiliated by the kind of psychiatrist here to tell them the meds are for their kids confidence and anger.

We also address the gender and sexual issues and spectrum these kids present as the boys feel unfair due to feminism and the misconceptions that exist where they're unable to relate as to why it concerns them and why they should behave respectfully towards others

This has allowed me to teach them sex-ed along with being smart with how much they share at home since their parents wouldn't want their kids knowing they are getting sex-ed at school. But the kids are now affecting their communities in their own way and using their tricks and holding spaces for their mothers or sisters who are facing abusive fathers and teaching them to respond in smarter ways where they don't have to get beaten up. This in turn has affected the families mental health and how the child is able to study better and be happier.

One particular kid Atharva who has agreed to share his name and story in all our work was a very difficult kid for years, often locking the girls up in the room, having severe body image issues, running out of class to drink water and piss, eating in class and refusing to write, while being direct and rude to teachers and authority. He was put on meds for anger and confidence. He also had issues of seeing ghost and got severely triggered after an English choir group came to school. He described it as 'Those english movie like ghost that come out of TV right on the face'. So I reminded him of the swear method I told the boys and asked him to use it everytime he saw the ghost. It was a simple sentence of 'I will get Reshma didi to chop your penis off with a razor' - this made him burst out laughing at the very sight of a ghost having it's penis fall off and fly away. After that he said he never saw any ghost. So we find adolescents responding to such humour really powerful in their self-talk and healing. The principal said 'What have you done to some of these boys, it is as if they are actually put on meds but they are not. They are still being brats and rascals but have so much awareness of their feelings and thoughts.'

So these are the 'alternatives' so to say mainly using concepts from martial arts combined with shamanism which focuses on respect, consent, creativity, awareness, self-control, humour and a lot of empathy and compassion practiced with the kids.