MAARGADARSHI SAMMELANA

GUIDEBOOK

EMPOWER STUDENT VOICES • FOSTER INCLUSIVE DEMOCRATIC SPACES • CHAMPION STUDENT-DRIVEN INITIATIVES

OVERVIEW OF INVOLVE

Involve is a non-profit organisation committed to empowering students across India by fostering age-appropriate agency. Co-founded by IIT graduates Divanshu Kumar and Samyak Jain, our mission is to equip students for the demands of the 21st century. Over the next five years, we aim to impact one million students by employing a peer learning-teaching model rooted in our belief in prioritising children's needs and guided by our core design principles: co-creation with students, student-led initiatives, and voluntary participation.

Currently, Involve collaborates with over 200,000 students nationwide, significantly enhancing their learning outcomes (with a 39% improvement in maths scores from baseline to endpoint) and fostering a stronger sense of ownership and leadership through our programs. Our flagship Peer Teaching program engages students aged 12-16 to serve as teachers and mentors to their peers in public schools. This approach has not only demonstrated remarkable academic progress but also positively influenced the overall learning culture, teenage behaviour, and more.

Our broader vision at Involve is to cultivate age-appropriate agency in students, encouraging greater engagement in learning, nurturing curiosity, honing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and fostering active participation in decision-making processes for themselves and their peers. Supported by prominent institutions such as the Central Square Foundation, Nudge Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, Wells Fargo, TFIx, and The Agency Fund, among others, we are a dynamic team comprising diverse backgrounds and skills, bolstered by experienced advisors. Learn more about us through features in Deccan Herald, Logical Indian, YourStory, and TBI.

NEED OF THE HOUR

STUDENTS MUST BE UNIQUELY EQUIPPED FOR THE FUTURE.

In India, 250 million students attend 1.5 million government schools. However, the prevailing one-size-fits-all approach and the absence of personalised education have resulted in significant gaps in foundational competencies and a lack of preparedness for the future among our students.

With nearly 50% of current occupations expected to disappear by 2025 and 75% of India's 230 million youth either entering or gearing up to enter the workforce, there is an urgent need to equip our students with the necessary skills for the future.

Unfortunately, many students lack the agency to actively participate in, engage with, and create meaningful learning experiences.

OVERVIEW OF MAARGADARSHI

In multiple Indian languages, "Maargadarshi" translates to "Guide" .

At Involve, this word holds dual significance. Firstly, it represents our students who serve as change agents, paving the way for positive transformation. Secondly, it symbolises our program's role as a guiding force, inspiring us to ideate and innovate new interventions, programs, and opportunities aligning with Involve's vision.

Through the Maargadarshi program, we collaborate with around 25 schools in the Anekal block of Bengaluru, focusing on designing and implementing student-centric initiatives. Our efforts encompass researching program design and measurement tools, developing impactful and scalable content, and exploring interventions that amplify student voices and restore their agency within the educational ecosystem. One of our longstanding initiatives in the Anekal block since 2019 is the Peer Teaching program.

INTRODUCTION TO OUR YEAR-END SHOWCASE

Towards the end of each academic year, we host a year-end showcase to provide a platform for students from all our schools across Bengaluru to gather and showcase their progress and accomplishments. This event welcomes teachers, government stakeholders, NGOs, and parents to witness the students' achievements.

In each edition, the spotlight is on our students, who consistently engage in captivating conversations and discussions. During the showcase, students demonstrate what they've learned throughout the year through their skillfully crafted Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs).

In addition, we utilise this platform to recognize the invaluable contributions of schools and teachers to the success of the peer teaching program. Moreover, we take the opportunity to honour student leaders for their dedication and hard work in empowering their fellow learners.
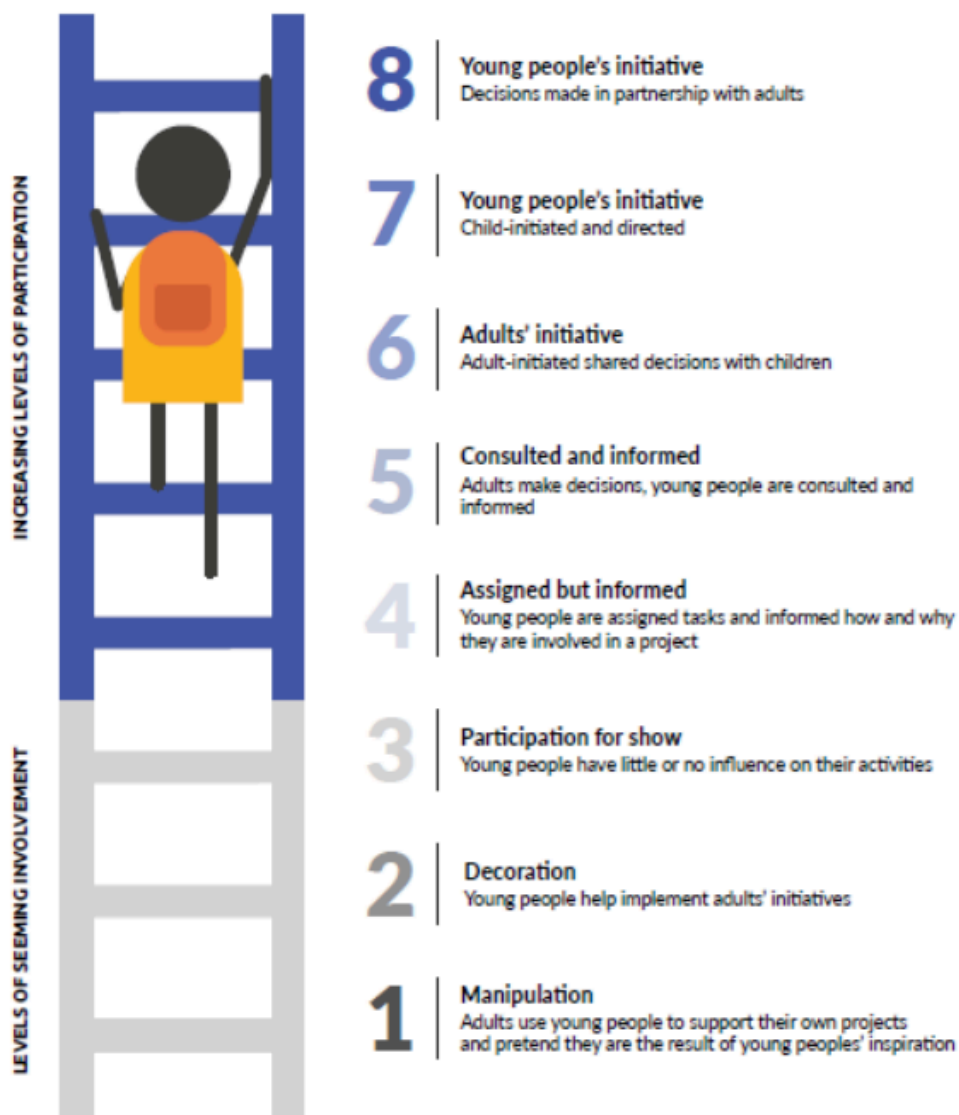
OVERVIEW OF MAARGADARSHI SAMMELANA

In 2024, we renamed the showcase Maargadarshi Sammelana to align with our vision of student empowerment and agency.

During a webinar by the Riverside Learning Centre discussing their establishment of student committees to organise school events, our team was inspired. We sought ways to integrate student voices into various aspects of our program, with the year-end showcase being a key area for collaboration with students.

Drawing from the OECD's 'ladder of participation' in 2022, we initiated the Year-End Showcase at the fourth level of student participation, assigning tasks and informing students about the event's purpose and procedures. By 2023, we invited students to host the event, marking a transformative year. Witnessing their confidence, seamless adaptation of scripts, and engaging interaction with the audience was truly inspiring.

Moved by our students' remarkable performance and the inspirational talk by Riverside, we took a bold step forward in 2024. We elevated student involvement to the sixth level of the participation ladder, where adults initiated the event but decisions were made collaboratively with students. Handing over the reins, we formed committees with shared responsibilities. To our delight, we observed 20% of students operating at the eighth level of participation, serving as partners in decision-making and collaborating with adults to shape the event.

Eight levels of young people's participation

8 Young people's initiative
Decisions made in partnership with adults

7 Young people's initiative
Child-initiated and directed

6 Adults' initiative
Adult-initiated shared decisions with children

5 Consulted and informed
Adults make decisions, young people are consulted and informed

4 Assigned but informed
Young people are assigned tasks and informed how and why they are involved in a project

3 Participation for show
Young people have little or no influence on their activities

2 Decoration
Young people help implement adults' initiatives

1 Manipulation
Adults use young people to support their own projects and pretend they are the result of young peoples' inspiration

INCREASING LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

LEVELS OF SEEMING INVOLVEMENT

MAARGADARSHI SAMMELANA
A STUDENT-LED INITIATIVE

HOW IT WORKED

Following two years of learning and collaboration from the Year-End Showcase, we transitioned into a partnership with our students, establishing effective practices and structures for hosting successful student-led events.

To facilitate this transition, we formed various committees. These teams consisted of the Core Committee, responsible for overarching coordination, and specialised committees such as Invitation, Logistics, Decoration, Food, and Hosting. Each committee was led by a designated team member from our organisation, referred to as the committee lead. The committee lead served as a guide, facilitating brainstorming sessions and providing support to students throughout the planning and execution process.

STUDENT SELECTION CRITERIA

- **Higher-grade students of the school:** As we wanted to offer them leadership opportunities before they graduate from our program

- **Students with access to phones and the internet:** As discussions and conversations are conducted online due to the diverse mix of students from different schools

- Students who demonstrate a commitment to work on the event throughout January

- Students who have obtained parental consent to participate

Once the student cohort was selected, committees were allocated to schools based on their respective responsibilities, levels of engagement, and location.

MAARGADARSHI SAMMELANA
A STUDENT-LED INITIATIVE

QUICK PITCH

Interested students were encouraged to nominate themselves and present their candidacy through a Quick Pitch session as part of the nomination process. During this session, they were required to address two key questions:

- Outline their skills and explain how these skills prepared them to contribute effectively to their chosen committee.
- Share examples of successful collaboration experiences that had led to desired outcomes in the past.

Following the Quick Pitch session, nominees were evaluated based on the votes they received from their peers for their pitch. This ensured a democratic selection process that promoted student engagement and involvement in decision-making.

STUDENT ORIENTATION

Students were provided with an hour-long orientation session to acquaint them with their committee members, emphasise the significance of the end showcase, and outline the roles and responsibilities of each committee. Expectations were clarified, and the next actionable steps were discussed during this orientation.

COMMITTEE: RESPONSIBILITIES AND GUIDELINES

The respective committee leads established separate WhatsApp groups with the students, providing them with digital safety guidelines and setting expectations for online interaction, timing, ethics, and rules.

Each committee held daily online meetups over two consecutive weeks, during which a checklist of responsibilities and tasks, along with a timeline for completion, was shared with the students. These meetings served as platforms for students to brainstorm ideas, voice concerns and challenges, seek support as needed, and update their progress.

In subsequent meetings, students collaborated to devise names and designs for their committee badges:

- Invitation committee: Dhruvathare
- Logistics committee: Helpline
- Decoration committee: Sneha Shilpigalu
- Food committee: Abhiruchi
- Hosting committee: Kings & Queens

COMMITTEE: RESPONSIBILITIES AND GUIDELINES

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Invitation Committee:** Managing all aspects related to making invitation cards, preparing guest lists, inviting guests, deciding the token of gifts, and ensuring registration during the event day.

- **Logistics Committee:** Procuring supplies required for all the committees, deciding the venue, coordinating transportation, providing technical support for the event day, managing the crowd, and overseeing the discipline.

- **Decoration Committee:** Developing a cohesive theme and visual concepts for the event that reflects the purpose. Generate creative DIY crafts for the event décor, including a welcome board, photo booth, wish wall, stage backdrop, seating arrangement, etc.

- **Food Committee:** Selecting suitable food vendors considering the quality and cost, developing an appealing food menu, planning and organizing the food stations, and providing hospitality services such as coffee and snacks to refresh attendees.

- **Hosting Committee:** Preparing the day's script with the events flow, welcoming the people, introducing the speakers, MC'ing, and encouraging audience participation and interaction.

SHOWTIME: ON THE DAY

The culmination of our students' meticulous planning resulted in the unfolding of our Maargadarshi Sammelana.

Upon entering the event venue, guests were greeted by a vibrant space transformed into a wonderland by the students of the decoration committee. Adorned with emojis, colourful balloons, and butterflies, the hall emanated a sense of childlike joy for all attendees.

Amidst the lively atmosphere, students busily set up their school stalls to showcase their year-long learnings. At the registration desk, meticulously organised by the registration committee, attendees' details were recorded with precision, ensuring everyone received their designated welcome gifts.

Throughout the event, the food committee ensured timely service of snacks and beverages to sustain participants' energy levels, while also enforcing strict measures to prevent littering. Meanwhile, the logistics committee diligently provided all necessary materials to support the setup of stalls, ensuring smooth operations for all committees.

Enthusiastic students also assumed the role of discipline managers, ensuring the safe and orderly movement of the audience and participants. Finally, the hosting committee took centre stage with their dynamic speeches, engaging interviews, and spirited anchoring, captivating the audience and ensuring a memorable experience for all.

SHOWTIME: ON THE DAY

PANEL DISCUSSION

A highlight of the day was an engaging panel discussion featuring student representatives from each committee, moderated by a member of the hosting committee. They shared firsthand experiences and insights gained through committee participation, expressing pride in their roles and newfound confidence in teamwork. Students fondly recalled memorable moments from planning sessions and expressed eagerness to seize future opportunities, emphasizing the importance of personal growth and confidence in working with diverse teams. They concluded with a commitment to embracing similar chances in the future.

In their own words: "We will encounter many such opportunities in our homes or as we transition to colleges, and we should be prepared to embrace them." Another student added, "I would like to participate in such events in the future because it will give us confidence to work with more people. I also have realised that if anyone wants to try something we should give them a chance to do it."

REFLECTIONS

Following each program, our organisation adopts a practice of reflecting on our successes and areas for improvement. Surprisingly, on this occasion, several of our students suggested conducting a reflection specifically focused on the event itself. Utilising an online reflection space, we delved into unforgettable moments from the event, discussed aspects that students enjoyed, and identified areas that could be enhanced for future events.

Below are some reflections provided by our students:

POSITIVES

- 'I was part of the stage decoration, and after seeing the stage, I felt so happy."
- "I was hosting the event, I was talking to everyone in the event; many teachers, guests and my friend appreciated and shared that I did it well. So happy about it."
- "I am part of the registration committee. I registered the people who attended the event and gave them a gift, which made me happy."

SUGGESTIONS

- "We could have included learners as well. So learners could have shared their opinion."
- "I was part of the logistics team. You could have taken us when you were talking to the venue, so we could have learned from you how to communicate for these purposes."
- "We could get a chance to talk about Peer teaching on stage."

LEARNINGS

- "I learned how to plan and get things done at home as well."
- "I got more ideas and TLMs for my PT class."
- "I got more confidence from other peers by seeing them doing it."

IMPACT

In the wake of our Maargadarshi Sammelana, we've witnessed a notable shift in the year-end showcases of Lower Primary Schools supported by our organization. They've embraced the student-led and student-centric approach showcased at the Maargadarshi Sammelana, demonstrating its tangible impact on schools, teachers, and students alike. This collaborative effort has transformed teachers and students into partners, ensuring the successful execution of their showcase events. Teachers who participated in the Maargadarshi Sammelana were pleasantly surprised by their students' ability to orchestrate such an event successfully, and it's gratifying to witness the newfound confidence they have in their capabilities, fostering the growth and empowerment of age-appropriate agency.

LEARNINGS

- This year, when we made the decision to involve students in the planning stage, some of us harboured doubts about whether students could truly take ownership of certain aspects. However, as the program progressed, it became evident that students are indeed capable, and it is essential for us to trust them and provide appropriate guidance.

- Engaging students from the outset of the planning process requires us to allocate more time, as they will be navigating new responsibilities and may require additional support compared to adults.

- It is crucial to orient students regarding their roles within their respective committees and to establish clear expectations regarding time commitments.

- Securing written and oral consent from parents, and ensuring that this consent is verified, is paramount.

- Including students on the core committee provides them with valuable insight into budgeting considerations.

- When planning for student involvement, it is essential to take into account students' travel logistics, including the distance between the event venue and the schools represented by the decoration team.

CONCLUSION

The Maargadarshi Sammelana organized in the Anekal block has already sparked a ripple effect across our programs, leading to the blossoming of similar student-led events in multiple regions. From celebrating NIPUN champions in the UP team to teacher-led initiatives in BBMP schools, the impact has been profound. Students from BBMP schools who attended the Maargadarshi Sammelana were inspired to adopt various initiatives, including fearlessly moderating and asking questions to teachers, taking on hosting responsibilities, and incorporating games into exhibition halls.

These events serve as transformative spaces for students, offering invaluable opportunities to learn from each other and shape their beliefs in their own capabilities. When students are granted the freedom to make choices, set goals, and take ownership of their education, they become active participants in their learning journey. This not only fosters a sense of autonomy and self-direction but also cultivates deeper engagement, motivation, and passion.

Believing strongly in the narrative of student agency, we are eagerly looking forward to the next year, where we aim to ascend further up the participation ladder. Our goal is to reach the eighth level, where students initiate the event, and decisions are made in true partnership with both adults and students alike.