

Rosalyn Yake



26 years old

President and Founder, Starfish Scholarships India
Gold Award Holder (Direct), IGE 2005 Delegate

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As a high-school student, Rosalyn Yake was very active, and eager to challenge herself. The Award provided her with opportunities to participate in various community service projects. She was looking to improve her resume and wanted to have a competitive advantage when applying for university scholarships and internship programs.

Unmet Social Need/Issue:

The idea—of providing a \$1,000 Starfish Scholarship to a participant of the Award Program at the [Olcott Memorial School](#), to be granted towards post-secondary education—was born when Rosalyn volunteered for four weeks in the summer of 2008, in Chennai, India. She had attended the 2005 International Gold Encounter in Hong Kong and China, and as part of this endeavour, joined forces with a delegate, Anantha Naryana, of Chennai India to plan a project organized around the IGE theme of poverty.

The Olcott Memorial School was founded in 1894 to provide schooling to the children of India's fifth caste who were denied access to regular schools. It is run by the [Theosophical Society](#) with the vision of “social change through the education of the underprivileged”. It provides free education in Tamil, to children from socially and

economically disadvantaged families, consisting mainly of fisher folk, manual labourers, and housemaids with family incomes between \$250 to 500 USD a year.

Low and fluctuating incomes exposed children to increased risks of domestic violence, alcoholism, and abuse. They receive little support from family for educational pursuits, and often end up leaving school to help supplement family income. Although the school strives to provide students with meaningful extra-curricular activities and opportunities for recognition, it struggles with the challenges of limited financial and staff resources.

On the other hand, admission into Indian Universities is highly competitive. Fortunately, the government's caste-based reservation system sets aside more than 50% of its spaces for students from underprivileged castes and provides scholarships and funding to some of these students. But these funds are insufficient to cover all the expenses associated with university life. A \$1,000 scholarship would cover four years of tuition at many Indian universities, and contribute towards additional expenses, including books, transportation, and living costs.

Idea:

Rosalyn founded Starfish Scholarships India and registered it as a charitable foundation in Ontario, Canada to administer its scholarship program. Its aims are to enable students to further their university, college, pre-university schooling or vocational training fees, to break the cycle of poverty and make possible a better life for the recipient and their families.

Its mission statement, "breaking the cycle of poverty, one dream at a time," is named after the story of a man throwing thousands of starfish stranded on the shore, back into the ocean, one at a time. [See Resources for the story.]

Implementation:

In January 2009, Rosalyn entered into a national video contest, *WhoInspiresU*, with [a film she produced about her trip to India](#), and her volunteer experience at the Olcott Memorial School. This required an appeal to friends, family, and global Duke of Ed contacts to vote online for her video. Mobilizing support involved weekly emails to Duke participants, a Facebook Group with 600 members, weekly YouTube video commercials, newspaper articles, and having the Australia Award Body post a link to Yake's video on their Award website. Rosalyn won first place in the contest, and a \$10,000 cheque helped her pursue the dream of establishing a scholarship program for underprivileged children at the Olcott Memorial School. It was "truly a global effort," Rosalyn says.



At Havergal College, where Rosalyn is a boarding school don, she has conducted additional fundraising activities with the school's Duke of Ed group, such as *Pennies for Dream*, used book drives and dinners to promote awareness and inspire action amongst her followers. Anne Kneale, the Vice-President of the Starfish Scholarships and a Gold Award Holder, recently won a \$2,500 grant from Canada's Millennium Foundation and is contributing her reward towards the Starfish Scholarship program.

Although the project was not part of Rosalyn's Award program, Anya Kazakova, a member of the Board, is a Gold participant and is using the time she spends on the Board of Directors, as part of her community service hours. Starfish Scholarships is also recruiting a Financial Officer who will be use his or her experience to complete the service component of the Duke program.

Impact:

Scholarships and awards offer students at the Olcott Memorial School something to strive for, and to believe in. The scholarships are intended to build self-confidence, break the cycle of poverty, and advance leadership in through the participant's community. Olcott Memorial School, is a charitable school, and is therefore limited by opportunities to offer further scholarships.

Education = upwards social mobility. A child from an impoverished family gaining a college education has significant economic and social impacts on the family as well as the community. Neighbourhood kids will be inspired by one of their peers, to strive towards better prospects. Starfish Scholarships is envisioned to promote community success, one youth at a time, and for a nominal amount.

According to Rosalyn, the first scholarship will be awarded in May 2010 and an Award committee has been formed to select recipients. A PenPal account is being organized to transfer funds between the Olcott Memorial School and Havergal College School.

"It has been amazing to watch this organization grow. I feel we have created something larger than ourselves; something that will continue to grow and make a difference even when we are no longer on this Earth. It feels empowering to give other young people a chance to play a leadership role in the organization. Nothing is more fulfilling than the feeling that you have had a positive impact on someone's life, no matter how big or small that impact is."

Rosalyn Yake, President and Founder of Starfish Scholarships



Long Term:

Rosalyn and her team are confident Starfish Scholarships India will bode well: Gold Award Holders volunteer their time and the organization strives to give a reason for Gold Award Holders, to mentor incoming youths discovering the Award and promote knowledge exchange. Five of the six board members are Gold Award Holders or Gold Participants. Their next initiative is to develop the “Leader in Training” Board positions and they hope to empower at-risk communities, particularly Aboriginal youths in Canada with an opportunity to be involved in a global leadership program, and to encourage them to participate in the Award too. Whether participants have physical or mental health challenges, are newly landed immigrants, inner city youths or participants in programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, they would all be invited. Their contribution and volunteer spirit will help with the general management of the organization, and they will be recognized with a “Leader-In-Training” position on the board.

Rosalyn's attitude toward the Award has certainly evolved over time. She is no longer pursuing these activities with the objective of enhancing her resume or credentials, rather the values instilled by the Duke of Ed has become a way of life and bigger than she could have imagined when she first received her blue book!



RESOURCES

Olcott Memorial School, Chennai India

<http://www.olcott-school-chennai.org/>

The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai India

<http://www.ts-adyar.org/index.html>

FACEBOOK GROUP: STARFISH SCHOLARSHIPS INDIA

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=132060600106>

Cross-border Award connection inspires poverty project in India

17 December 2008

<http://www.intaward.org/uploads/documents/Award%20World%20issue%2059.pdf>

The Story Behind the name of Starfish Scholarships India:

Once upon a time, there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work.

One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up.

As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean.

He came closer still and called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young man paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean."

"I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" asked the somewhat startled wise man.

To this, the young man replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die."

Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!"

At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, he said, "It made a difference for that one."

