

Thought Leadership

Voyaging beyond the horizon...

Little Krishna:

A case study that exists in the quantum field of infinite potential

Dr Kemal Shaheen

"What kind of world do you want to live in? What kind of society do you want to help build?"

– Muhammad Yunnus



A series of papers
engaging
critically and creatively
with the world
around us as we
voyage
beyond the horizon....

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Paper Boat's Vision: ***"A world that unlocks the infinite potential of every child."***

"I believe in human potential. We can be a destructive force of this planet, but we can also be a creative, caring force. It's the principle of quantum physics: nothing is fixed, nothing is separated, everything can be transformed, nothing is certain. This is why we must expand this human potential by educating generations today and of the future..." (Vandana Shiva – philosopher and social activist)

"Our educational system is all wrong. We manage to teach mathematics, physics, chemistry, history but we do not help young people discover who they are or the role that they could play in the world. Today, the implicit goal of school can be summed up like this: work hard, get good grades, and fight to get the best possible job. It's fairly narrow in terms of a goal for a human being. It's even pretty depressing. Human beings are not merely born to work for someone else, to earn a salary, we are unique creations in a world full of creations. And this unique aspect is completely excluded, crushed, standardized. Education should mean telling children: You are a being full of potential, you have the power to become and do whatever you want. Here are the tens of thousands of options that you have. What kind of world do you want to live in? What kind of society do you want to help build?" (Muhammad Yunus – entrepreneur and founder of Grameen Bank)

This case study is only partially true – and is based on Krishna's story as depicted in the following short film produced by CEDAR's Alternative Media Centre. However, somewhere in the quantum field of infinite potential, it exists as a future reality. The principle of quantum mechanics suggests that how we respond to this case study could determine how the future unfolds for our project, our partnership and hundreds, possibly thousands, of children like little Krishna.

The Plunge:

A short film about Krishna and his family:

<https://vimeo.com/436408300>

Krishna's eyes sparkle when you talk to him about fishing...it has been a source of constant happiness throughout his life.



From an early age fishing served as a welcome distraction from painful childhood experiences growing up in Madurai's largest slum. Today it lies at the heart of his award winning social enterprise that is not only helping to meet food security needs in the slum community he grew up in but, thanks to a philosophy of zero waste and the efficient use of fish by products, is helping to provide sustainable energy solutions in those very same communities. Fish waste – the bones, intestines and skin can not only be used in the bio-digestion chambers of bio-gas installations – providing a cheap source of fuel and lighting but can also be made into a highly effective fertiliser and animal feed. Thanks to Krishna's ingenious use of fish waste products he has collaborated with other sustainable enterprise initiatives that are helping to make the slum a more environmentally friendly and attractive community.



His fertiliser is used by a flourishing small scale market garden initiative that is reducing food miles, is helping to grow local business opportunities for other slum dwellers and meets important nutritional needs for communities that now have access to more diverse and fresher fruit and vegetables grown locally. This is leading to the greening and productive use of former waste land in

the slum. His animal feed is greatly appreciated by those neighbours that keep one or two cows for milk – before they used to eat plastic and other rubbish from piles of fetid waste close to where they were tethered. As a result the cows are healthier and their milk yield has increased. Krishna is very clear about what it is that helped him to turn his life around, identify sustainable opportunities for meeting vital needs in his local community and unlock the entrepreneurial potential that very few people saw in him (not least himself)

"It was meeting my mentor that opened my eyes to the idea of what is possible when you look beyond this throw away culture of ours. And I wouldn't have met Prasanth if I hadn't got involved with the enterprise hubs that CEDAR helped my community to set up. Even my father was telling me that my best hope was to become a stone mason and earn 200 rupees a day....as for my teachers, I never stayed in school long enough for them to talk to me about what might be possible in life, not that any of them seemed that bothered"

When we first met Krishna at the age of 10 he was the subject of a short film produced by CEDAR's Alternative Media Centre which captured the lives of young people growing up in the slums of Madurai. He was a very different person to the confident, articulate and highly creative young man he is today.



Krishna grew up in a poor household. Neither of his parents had a reliable source of income when we met him as both suffered from debilitating conditions preventing them holding down regular jobs. His younger sister rarely attended school because she served as the primary care giver for her ailing mother although she told us she would love to be in school. Krishna, like his two older brothers had no interest in school. His brothers were petty traders by day and petty criminals by night – and things were to become much more serious shortly



after we shot our film - to the extent that his eldest brother had been implicated in the murder of an 80 year old woman. Their deeper involvement with the criminal gangs of Madurai's slums began with substance abuse – negative coping strategies all too common in alienated youngsters growing up in slum communities. Krishna had already embarked on the same path as his brothers – what began as the occasional joint smoked with friends whilst fishing or getting drunk on cheap spirits stolen from the local liquor store soon became solvent abuse. He had even begun to notice, and take an interest in, the sedative effect that the brown powder smoked off foil had on his brothers. It seemed they had found a way to help block out the daily frustrations and numerous painful experiences that beset their lives – not least that, from an early age, they had all had it drummed into them that, as Pariah's they came from an untouchable caste – which made them impure and unclean in the eyes of higher caste neighbours. This had stopped little Krishna (or any of his siblings) from daring to dream about what a better life might look like....that was for higher caste boys and girls.



Krishna's life began to change however when local community activist Meayaapen encouraged him to attend the children's enterprise hub that Paper Boat's partner CEDAR were running alongside the women's enterprise hub that his mother had found regular employment through – sewing bags for a new social enterprise. At first Krishna was reticent and somewhat diffident. He had been let down and ignored too many times in his life by other authority figures like teachers to immediately trust the staff at

CEDAR. However the staff noticed a significant improvement in Krishna after just 3 weeks of participating in CEDAR's cutting edge art programme. A ground breaking initiative that was designed in partnership with Caplor Horizons and draws on the latest insights from neuroscience to help improve children's self-esteem by tapping into aesthetic and collaborative intelligence linked to the neural networks located in the heart (which are every bit as significant for human development as the neural networks that exist in the brain).

Activist and fine artist Guna worked with Krishna and other young people participating in the enterprise hub, using collaborative art projects to challenge the negative self-images associated with untouchability and drawing on techniques commonly used in neuro-linguistic programming helping to rebuild a positive self-image and a stronger conviction in their own potential. Crucially these art classes also helped Krishna identify and articulate what he was passionate about and how he could draw on his passions to solve problems that exist in his community. For Krishna it was obvious – fishing was not just his time pass, it was also his passion.



Once the spark had been ignited and Krishna began to believe in his own 'infinite potential' he relished the opportunity to learn more about the vital role that entrepreneurial thinking has in transforming lives and communities for the better.



The turning point for Krishna came when he was inspired after a session with a mentor who had told his own story about his entrepreneurial journey and how horrified he had been with the levels of rampant consumption accompanied by a throw away culture that he saw all round him. This is what motivated his mentor to set up a new social enterprise and it got Krishna thinking about all of the waste that he saw from the fish he caught and occasionally sold to others in his community. What if those bones, skin, blood and guts could be put to good use rather than clog up gutters and pollute stagnant water increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. Thanks to the digital literacy skills that Krishna had been taught as part of the enterprise programme and access to CEDAR's computer lab – he was able to research all of the uses that fish by products could be put to. He was amazed at how many there were. As a result of ongoing mentoring from Krishnan he identified a viable business opportunity utilising fish waste, developed a business plan and secured a small loan as seed capital for his social enterprise from a long-term Paper Boat supporter who had been inspired by the short film that CEDAR's Alternative Media Centre had helped him to produce showcasing his ideas.

Fast forward 5 years and Krishna's social enterprise is part of a burgeoning collaborative circular economy that is starting to radically transform the slum community that he lives in. More and more households have started to set up micro-farms around their houses and utilising waste land that had previously been rubbish strewn – because they can now improve soil quality thanks to Krishna's low cost fertiliser. This urban gardening is leading to the greening of the slum as well as increasing the fresh fruit and vegetables available to the local community –which is less reliant on food imported from outside their communities and is significantly fresher and healthier. There has been an increase in civic pride and the local authorities are even starting to conduct studies on the increased yield with a view to transporting the model to other slums in Madurai.

If you would like to find out more or are interested in working with us please get in touch with Dr Kemal Shaheen (kemal@paperboatcharity.org.uk)

Dr Kemal Shaheen – Director of Paper Boat



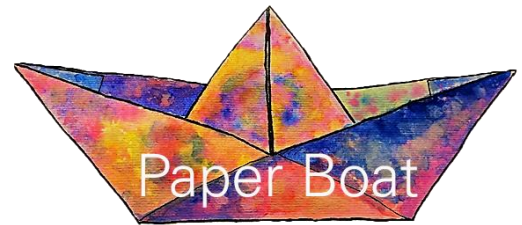
Inspiring and enabling children to change their world





Our Vision

A world that unlocks the
infinite potential
of every child



Our Purpose

To listen to young people –
inspiring and enabling them to
change their world

Our Mission

To establish playful and
creative learning spaces at the
heart of communities through
innovative partnerships

Our Values

Courage – child centred

Creativity – innovative action

Collaboration – stronger together

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