

Public Outreach Workshop Summaries

Four parallel workshops were held to deliberate ways in which the public can be inspired, informed and engaged through practice of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings in relation to the environment. The outcomes were to be disseminated through public meetings, interfaith engagement, community engagement and walk for values.

Public Meetings

Public meetings can be held at the following locations:

- Sai centres with newcomers and members' friends.
- Sai members' homes with relatives, friends and neighbours.
- Public venues for 50, 100, and 200 people. Larger programmes will require extensive efforts in creating awareness, prior to the event, in order to maximise attendance.

Information shared through media platforms such as use of leaflets, posters, newspapers, radio, TV, internet and social networks like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. must be maximized to achieve more public outreach.

Speakers: Men and women considered for this role should possess in-depth knowledge of Sathya Sai Baba's life, mission and activities of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO). Additionally, they should practice Sathya Sai Baba's teachings in their daily lives.

Message: The message must be mastered in order to engage and inspire the audience. The message too must be inspiring, clear, and exhaustive.

Contents: Our mission is to disseminate information to the general public without any intention to convince or convert. We communicate our knowledge and experiences, with simplicity and common sense.

Topics to be highlighted:

- The universality of Sathya Sai Baba's spiritual message and teachings.
- SSIO does not belong to any particular religion and does not proselytise. It encompasses all. It is not a religion.
- All activities of the SSIO are executed free of charge and money is never solicited.
- People are transformed into better human beings by manifesting love in thought, word and deed.

Topics to be avoided:

Sathya Sai Baba is an Avatar and God incarnate. Those who are sincere in learning would quickly discover it for themselves. The following strategies and approaches are recommended:

- The local culture and laws of the land should be respected and reflected in the local Sai Centre. A predominantly Hindu environment consisting of altars and religious icons should be avoided in case it will be perceived as a cult/sect or is alien to the local culture.
- A topic must be selected in accordance with the local needs and/or based on the general interest of the public.
- A slide presentation or video can be prepared to make the session more interactive and engaging.
- Authority representatives, religious leaders and famous personalities can be invited to attend the meetings.
- The seminars/workshops can be conducted either in person or online.
- There is a Public Outreach referent based in each country, who can be contacted and involved to meet goals.
- Each person can be an ambassador of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings by the virtue of their personal example.
- The success or failure of the event must not be benchmarked based on the total number of attendees.

Interfaith Engagement

The purpose of this workshop was to:

1. Recommend better strategies to foster 'Unity of Races and Religions', so that the Sarva-Dharma (multi-faith) emblem is not just an ornament but a reality of 'faiths in action'.
2. Promote Intra-faith activities, so that people have a better knowledge and understanding of the common values that bind all religions – Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love, and Non-violence.

Sathya Sai Baba urges us to continue following the religion of our choice and/or upbringing. He has come to foster and feed the roots of all religions. Sathya Sai Centres around the world are Interfaith Centres that respect and revere the main religion(s) professed in the country. The prayers and other spiritual activities in the Centre should project Sai's vision of a 'Universal Multi-Faith Organisation' carrying out Sathya Sai Baba's call: "All are one, be alike to everyone".

Be a force for nation building

People and other religious organisations will aspire to be associated with the SSIO only if we are perceived to be a positive force in promoting interfaith unity for nation building, which can be observed in our selfless community service as well as our human value programmes.

The following are suggested activities that have been tested successfully:

1. Religious leaders can be invited to speak at Sai Centres during religious celebrations.
2. Major service activities shall be organised and conducted in conjunction with major religious/cultural festivals.
3. Seminars shall be conducted for children and young adults to assist them in understanding the values and teachings of their own religions.
4. Dramas can be prepared to build bridges between Sathya Sai International Organisation and other religious groups to promote harmony amongst the various religious groups.
5. An interfaith choir or orchestra can be put together to compose value based songs to use music as a tool to promote interfaith harmony e.g. LASA.
6. Interfaith sports events can be organised to build bridges between faiths through the spirit of sportsmanship.

Community Engagement

The purpose of this workshop was to discuss strategies to engage and positively transform communities, particularly through service.

The Five Pillars of Community Engagement

1. Energise ourselves to serve society

- Study circles can be conducted to discuss salient points of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings on the need to engage in community service.
 - SSIO members shall be empowered with the right enthusiasm to undertake community engagement activities and share their impact on individuals and communities served.
2. Empower ourselves with the right understanding of what is really needed in society
 - Accurate and extensive data shall be collected, to analyse the actual needs of the community, where the centre is located. Local authorities should be consulted. Once the needs are established, it needs to be decided:
 - Whether the service will bring maximum benefits to the community served.
 - Whether the community is already served by other NGOs
 - Whether the task ahead requires longer timelines for complete results.

- Whether expertise is available for the deployment
- Whether progress of the project can be measured
- Whether follow-ups are required to ensure sustainability
- Always begin with a task which is easy to accomplish.
- It should not be declared that you have come to eradicate or solve a problem (e.g. the alcoholic menace) in the community. Such a direct approach tends to provoke the people of the community and they tend to put up a defensive barrier which is hard to break through.
- Follow Sathya Sai Baba's maxim, 'Come, test me, experience me, then accept me'. This approach has been carried out in many parts of the world with considerable success.

3. Encourage community participation

The leaders of the community must be identified and involved throughout the process. The plan/project of the service offered must be shared with the leaders to obtain their feedback and input.

4. Enlighten communities with the right knowledge

- Local agencies that possess skills to empower SSIO members must be identified. SSIO centres globally that have implemented similar programmes should be identified in order to tap into their resources, knowledge and experience. Meetings should be held to obtain feedback from the community so that future works can be further refined.
- S.A.I (Skills, Attitude and Initiative) should be embodied while launching any programme.

5. Excellence in all that we do, to become role models.

Some useful indicators:

1. Social improvement indicators should be identified at the onset of the programme.
2. Reduction in crime and other social issues can be considered.
3. Community participation should be increased in all the programmes.
4. Frequency of meetings and the earnestness to attend such meetings by community members should be high.
5. Empowerment of community members should be prioritised, resulting in personal transformation.
6. The visibility of the programme should be high, in terms of acknowledgment from both local and national governments.

The transformation observed in the community resulting from project implementation must be documented, e.g. the percentage reduction of gang fights in the community, since the time the Sathya Sai Centre entered into the community.

Statistics can be obtained from local agencies and community leaders. Evaluation forms as well as questionnaires should be distributed to assess the effectiveness of the projects.

Walk for Values

The purpose of this workshop was to raise awareness about the importance of practicing Human Values in our daily lives and encourage each participant to take a pledge at the event to practice values for personal transformation, in order to bring a change at the local, national and global communities.

Walk for Values is an outreach project to connect with local communities so that Sathya Sai Baba's teachings are disseminated for building a better society. It usually involves a walk through a public area with additional activities for raising awareness. Therefore, it should involve the public at large, other associations and faith leaders, schools, businesses, and dignitaries, regardless of race, religion, colour, creed or socio-political association.

A programme team should be formed to oversee the entire project and complete tasks such as:

- Determining the schedule of events
- Liaison with partner organisations and groups
- Determining the route for the walk, securing permits, working with police and making other logistical arrangements
- Sourcing T-shirts, brochures, and creating other materials to raise awareness
- Planning the media coverage on the day e.g. photos, video to share the message further

The choice of route is very critical and the following points should be used as guidelines to determine the route:

1. The route should offer maximum visibility to the participants, so that there is ample readability of the Human Values, which should be depicted on banners and posters.
2. The distance of route should be between 3 to 4 km. Due consideration should be given to the age and physical limitations of children and seniors participating.
3. An ideal route should start and finish at the same venue by means of a circular route. This helps in better parking arrangements, stage management and other logistic controls.

It is advisable to discuss the route with the police in the area, before proceeding with the city application. Remember, not all routes may be approved. It is mandatory to apply for a permit to have a walk.

Key focus areas during the walk:

1. Human Values must be reflected throughout the project. Focus should be on public outreach and spreading Sathya Sai Baba's message to the community for self-transformation and helping the planet.
2. Community Engagement should be encouraged. Participating organisations should be included as a part of the programme. It is imperative to reflect openness, give them ownership and space to feel included in the project.
3. Interfaith leaders should be invited to lead the opening prayers and the walk.
4. Colourful floats, music bands and large groups of school children can be invited to be part of the walk.
5. The closing ceremony can include one or two dynamic speakers on the subject of: The practice of Values in our daily lives or the theme of the year, e.g. Go Green.
6. It is important to maintain discipline among participants.
7. Participants can be encouraged to walk with value banners, placards with quotes, and wearing same color T-shirts. However, no compulsion must be exerted to purchase a T-Shirt.
8. A sticker can be placed on the T-Shirt with the Value each one has pledged to practice.
9. The event should be organised as a family event with fun activities, cultural programmes, and games for children. The event must project the message of love and harmony in society.

The Bigger Vision – the next two years:

1. The organising committees should be strengthened by involving more volunteers and covering more cities.
2. Other community and faith leaders should be invited to form a 'Community Advisory Group'.
3. Local schools should be invited to participate and an award for the 'Best School participant' can be incorporated.
4. 'Community Character Awards' can be introduced. Applications can be sought from public for this award.
5. A "Go Green" award can be presented to an individual or organisation that has contributed to a change in the environment or reduced its carbon footprint.
6. The walk should be promoted at least 2 years in advance for increased public participation.
7. 24th April should be observed as 'Human Values Day'. Therefore, work must be undertaken on proclamation by all city councils.

Please refer to POC guidelines for more detailed information on how to organise the above activities

