

TN centre trains tribal youth in vocational skills



(Top) Students from Sola Tribal Children's Home during football practice session; (right) women engaged in wig making

Shevaroy Hills Tribal Development Institute (STDi) is an organisation that's established under SPS India Foundation of The Retreat in Yercaud. The organisation that was set up in 1992 caters to the development and welfare needs of tribal community in and around the region.

"The organisation was founded to reach out to tribal children who come from 61 villages of steep terrain, to have better educational facilities. We also support young people and women with various employment and livelihood opportunities from most of the villages. Shevaroy Hills is home to tribals known as Malayalis, meaning people of the hills. They are the most exploited and deprived people in the region. Their misery is compounded by poverty, illiteracy, ignorance of causes of diseases, poor sanitation, and lack of safe drinking water," says Fr Raj, Director of Shevaroy Hills Tribal Development Institute.

Sola Tribal Children's Home (SOTCHO), a boarding home, was established with the objective of providing accommodation, food, education to the

tribal children hailing from the remotest parts of villages. "Most of the children are first-generation learners — they are slow learners and take time to understand the concepts of mainstream education and teaching methods. Also, most of the houses manage with basic electricity and it's difficult for the students to learn from home. Keeping this in mind, they are giving after school training for certain subjects," he adds.

Apart from this, the centre undertakes developmental activities for youngsters in the villages through youth groups called Oratories. "To empower women from the region, we have also set up an organic kitchen garden and wig making. Around 200 women from nine panchayats of the hills have formed self-help groups to create awareness, empowerment and livelihood programmes," tells Fr Raj, who is also the rector/director of The Retreat (Don Bosco) in Yercaud.

Recently, a fundraising initiative was held in the city for supporting the education of tribal children. The event was jointly organised by Master's Loft and SPS India Foundation.