

Vocational Projects for the Autistic and Developmentally Delayed That Are Sustainable and Eco-Friendly

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Abstract : This paper presents the contribution of the Sunflowers Vocational Center, Karachi, Pakistan, by providing a platform for the students of special needs to work with recycled materials and express themselves in a more extravagant form. The concept was to create products that would generate enough income to sustain the program while keeping the students cognitively engaged through arts and crafts and tactile instructions due to their severe intellectual disabilities. Papier-mâché is an art form that is hands-on, repetitive, economical as well as beneficial for the environment. The process of tearing paper into long strips then covering them with paste and laying the strips atop the mold provides constant sensory input for our autistic students as well as the rest of our student population. Given the marginalized stance the society has on special needs, we have marketed the paper-mâché products on social media platforms and have set up booths in carnivals, festivities, open markets that are aimed towards a cause to sell. Our students in the vocational center have also made bins, baskets, and trays that are used in all classrooms. This has cut our costs on classroom materials considerably and has added a sense of accomplishment and furthered the teamwork skills in our sunflowers. The other achievement is our long clientele; orders have been placed from several persons for birthdays, parties, events, and the like. This exposure has raised awareness of the capabilities of persons of special needs and has started a conversation on the topic. And additional achievement is that we have made our teachers, their families, our students, and their families conscientious of the environment and incorporated reusing newspapers into classrooms. Situations where plastic would be bought, for example, bin, dustbins, containers, basket, trays, the paper-mâché products made by our students have been used instead. Due to the low cost of materials, this project is easily replicable and very easy to start. Piñatas are a very popular item for children's parties everywhere and are gaining popularity through social media. This is also easily replicable in any environment and can have a great impact on the use of plastic in any work or home environment.

Keywords : vocational training, special needs, cognitive skills, teamwork

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