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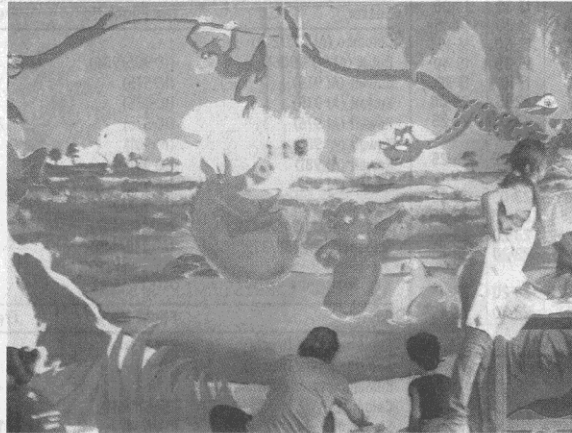
## Brush with reality

### OFFBEAT

Students' efforts to help kids at Children's Hospital forget their pain

A happy picture can be a tonic, especially for kids. So, when a bunch of enthusiastic young art students from Stella Maris College went about painting colourful and happy images on the drab walls of the cardiac ward at the Government Children's Hospital, Egmore, the kids there had a reason to smile.

Smiling serpents, mischievous monkeys, colourful flowers... they now brighten up the walls of the rooms where many kids (and their parents) have been camping for long — either awaiting surgery or post-operative care. Like Manik, a Class VI



**BRIGHTER SIDE** Students at work

student from Dharmapuri District, who has already spent a month-and-a-half in this ward, waiting for a cardiac valve. One of the kids who enthusiastically involved himself in the painting process says, "It was fun." Sometimes, they and their parents end up staying in the hospital for long periods which could vary from one to

six months. The parents are under stress too — worrying about the child in the hospital, and how the rest of the family is managing at home.

The exercise was an initiative of the 'Service Learning' concept which is part of the Stella Maris College curriculum and the Ekam foundation. Artists such as Benitha Perciyal, Siva and Gurnath-

an also pitched in, doing the preliminary drawing and the layout. "I think such community interaction and service should be made an integral part of every college course, whatever be the main subject," suggests Benitha, adding, "it will take 10 days for me to come to terms with the pain I saw on the kids' faces."

For the students, all in the third-year Bachelor of Visual Arts course, the experience has been an eye-opener. They chorus, "We would like to do more for these kids." Says course teacher Razia Tony of Stella Maris, "The project is a means for them to understand the harsh reality faced by some sections of society and contribute their mite to mitigate it. Besides it is a learning process — a way of putting into practice what has been taught in the curriculum."

Well, now, the kids in this hospital ward have something cheerful to look at, other than the pain on one another's face.

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