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We Strive founder, Mr. Suresh Vellanki shares his vision, mission, goals along with the trials and tribulations as he stood up the We Strive, a 501 (c) (3) organization that focuses on enabling and empowering the youth.

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Trip to Alaska: Join Medha Talluri (fourth grade) as she takes you to Alaska cruise through her essay.

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Comic Strip Illustration by Akshara Madasu (second grade)



We Strive Horizon Newsletter FIRST ISSUE!

We are very excited to revive the We Strive Horizon newsletter! We proudly present to you our first issue. Through this newsletter, we hope to connect with our members, patrons, and our supporters. The force behind this newsletter is an enthusiastic team of youth who are aspiring reporters and journalists of the future.



Founder Talk

IN CONVERSATION WITH MR. SURESH VELLANKI,
FOUNDER OF WE STRIVE.

Interviewed by: Isha Kannan

Mr. Suresh Vellanki founded We Strive in the year 2016 with a vision to contribute to the community by enabling the youth. Today, after six years, the organization grew leaps and bounds and has recently acquired the 501(c) (3) tax exemption status. In this issue, we will learn more about his mission, vision, and plans for the organization.

What inspired you to form the We Strive organization?

More than inspiration, it is a happenstance where we wanted to do something for the community. Initially, we planned for a data science certification program but eventually developed a life skills program for youngsters. With collaborative effort from the several volunteers and board members, this program snowballed into what it is today.

But the real inspiration originated from my dad due to an incident that is still fresh in my memory. We were hauling materials for rebuilding our house and hired a big guy with a cycle rickshaw. After he completed unloading the materials, my dad offered water and invited him home for dinner instead of paying and sending him off on his way. After some hesitation, he joined us and shared his story. We learned that he lost his house in a flood and migrated to our place. He also had two children who do not go to school.

"I THINK IT IS KEY FOR US TO EDUCATE ANYBODY AND EVERYBODY BECAUSE WE DO NOT WANT TO GIVE THEM DONATIONS, BUT RATHER TEACH THEM TO BE ABLE TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES."

As he left, my dad gave him a couple of hundred rupees for his children's education. I got angry and upset that he did not give me the money to buy cricket bat and instead gave it to that man. I fought with him and stopped talking to him for a couple of days. My dad had only one comment for me then. He said, *"You wouldn't understand this today, you may not understand it in few years, but someday, you will understand why I am doing this."*

Today, the more I think about it, I really understand what his desire was as he gave that little amount of money to that person. I think it is key for us to educate anybody and everybody because we do not want to give them donations, but rather teach them to be able to fend for themselves. That is the big part of it and the future of this

world is always with the youngsters. The more we enable them the more we can show them the different paths that exist out there. So that little story is my inspiration in terms of why I wanted to establish We Strive. Luckily, I have a great team that I was part of that enabled me to embark on this journey. So, it is a very emotional story for me.

Which year did you start We Strive?

This was six years ago. I would say June 2016.

How long has this organization worked with the community?

I would say for all the six years since we started. We had one program called “Life skills” at that time. From there, we grew from one program to almost about 45 to 50 different programs. So, We Strive has been helping the community for the past six years.

How is this organization working on building communities, projects, or situations that can self-sustain in the future?

Absolutely. I believe this is a two-part question. First one being we take a two-part strategic approach.

- i. The programs that we offer through We Strive today make an impact in the community and secondly, We Strive board members consistently brainstorm new ideas. We execute these ideas to offer the services to students with the hope that these students will grow and eventually contribute back to the community. That contribution is the key reason for us to enable the students to grow despite the constraints we face to roll out these programs.
- ii. Enabling the youngsters when they themselves come to us and offer to initiate clubs and help other children learn new skills or upgrade their own current skills. For instance, we have a student initiate a criminology club, another initiated a BioMed club. We also had Python programming club and so on.

For all the programs, I want to say the success rate in terms of thinking about the program and rolling it out into the community for the benefit of the community has been almost 99.9% meaning if anybody came in with an idea to us, we always supported them and rolled it out.

I think in all the six years, we might have said no to maybe one or two programs at the most. All the programs that were brought to us as an idea, we always supported those.

The second part of this question has multiple dimensions:

- i. Commitment of the Board of Directors. Fortunately, it has been adequate and strong. It is not a traditional board position. Some of the local organizations have such positions for a year or two. They come in and go out. But if you think about it, this particular board at We Strive, on average, 80% of them have been with the organization for the last five to six years. That is a huge commitment. Sustainability is partly driven by the commitment of the board of directors.
- ii. Commitment of the patrons in terms of realizing the value of the services that we offer. In addition, they are supporting these programs as we go forward, whether it is through participation or promotion.
- iii. Sustain these programs in the future through funding. We do not have memberships for any participants who use We Strive services because we have chosen to be a no cost model for all those who come to the

organization. However, there are donors who graciously donated to We Strive in the past and will continue to donate in the future. That is another dimension of how we are sustaining our services.

- iv. Fourth part is, we are growing our base or connection or partnerships with local organizations. When I say local organizations where corporates can donate significant amount of money that will help us offer more services at a much more effective pace.
- v. The last part is the alumni base, and the success of the students who achieved accomplishments through We Strive who also sustain the growth as we move forward.

Parents see that the students have been successful by participating, contributing and so on. So, more people are willing to come and join. In the first year, we had about 45 students. Today, we have about 1100 people and are growing. So, those are some of the mechanisms that we leverage today to sustain these services and grow them as we move forward.

What challenges did you face as you stood up We Strive?

So, quite a few challenges, I won't go into the greater details of it in the interest of the time but some of the challenges

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have been, specifically, in the first year, in terms of number of people that were utilizing the services. We did not have good traction. We only had about 40 to 45 people that were leveraging these services.

The second one is a challenge even today. Even though we are getting donations from people, we are not getting enough. That is a big challenge for us. How do we grow the contributions so that we can do bigger, better things in the community that are not only for the youth, but also for the community where we want to focus a lot more on underserved and under privileged students and youth? To be able to do that, we need funds and volunteers.

The third challenge is, people will sign up for a lot of programs, but they don't have the commitment to join these programs. So, as an example, 100 people might sign up for a particular program and only 30 will show up at the end of the day. So, what that does is build the initial momentum for the people that are conducting that program wherein they are excited that many people are interested in this. But later, when they see that only a few attended, that somewhat demotivates some of the people, right? So that has been another challenge.

The fourth aspect of it is because we are in no cost model for the patterns. Some of the things that we want to do from an infrastructure standpoint, we were not able to do it. As an example, for website development, having a facility rented for the entire year so that we don't have to be dependent on other folks for facility rentals to hold sessions and programs. So, those are some of the challenges that we have faced and that we are facing today as we move forward.

WE HAVE AN OPEN-DOOR POLICY TO PARTNERSHIPS. WE ARE OPEN TO EVERYONE AND BELIEVE IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION OF ALL RACES. BUT THE PARTNERSHIP IS BASED ON THE VISION MISSION AND THE VALUES THAT WE CARE ABOUT.

Are you considering partnership for We Strive? If so, what type of organizations are you willing to partner with?

Yes. We have an open-door policy to partnerships. We are open to everyone and believe in diversity, equity, and inclusion of all races. But the partnership is based on the vision mission and the values that we care about. Our vision is to enable youth and even adults to learn, grow, and contribute. And the big emphasis is on contribution – giving back to the community. You can learn and grow but carry the perspective that you want to give back someday.

We do not want to partner with organizations that are only in it for profit or have the need to drive a certain agenda. We do not partner with political and religious based organizations.

Is this organization growing as you expected?

Yes, sometime in the third, fourth and fifth year, the organization grew significantly. The board believes that there is capability and capacity to do more. Theoretically, putting out a number, by the tenth year, we want to be able to reach at least 10000 to 15000 people and in some years a 100000, but that number will not just within the United States, it can also be global.

Has there been any change in your vision as you started?

Yeah, good question. So initially when we started out, it was meant for a very limited audience right? The first year in June, we wanted to do data science certification for adults. That was the scope, but we were lucky that the vision, or I want to say the direction significantly shifted towards youth and growing the number of services that can enable them to learn, grow and contribute. So, initially the direction was in a different path. But I believe that now we are on the right path. So, there has been changed initially but the direction hasn't changed from, I want to say, mid of first year till now. I would say, for the first six months, the program might have been very limited in scope and on a different path. Ever since we were able to find the path that we want to focus on youth, the direction of enabling youth to be successful has been the direction.

Now, there could be some minor improvements or minor changes that we might. For example, we were a 100% zero cost model, and now, we might be charging for 10% of our services. But that charge goes back as donation to We Strive in the service of providing or doing greater good to the community.

EFFICIENT SLEEP METHODS

AN EXCERPT FROM SUHAAS MADASU'S RESEARCH

This study has been selected for the regionals (NCSEF Region 3A).

Problem:

Some people cannot fall asleep easily like our members in the team. It is a problem because we must wake up early and sleeping late reduces our sleep time. Our research is about finding a way to help people like us build healthy sleep routines.

Hypothesis:

Our hypothesis is that calm music is the best way to help the body relax and goes to sleep because the music will calm our brains and make us tired. We also think high school students have more trouble sleeping because they have a lot of work to do and all that causes stress and does not help to get good sleep.

Conclusion:

We concluded that using the 4-7-8 method was the most efficient way to make you fall asleep while the Guided Imagery did not accomplish much. Our hypothesis of listening to calming music took around an hour and half because the sound disturbed our sensories.

Effective Sleep Methods

Research

From our research, we found that the following methods help people fall asleep faster.

The Military Method
Relax your entire face, including the muscles inside your mouth. Drop your shoulders to release the tension and let your hands drop to the side of your body. Exhale, relax your chest. Relax your legs, thighs, and calves. Clear your mind for 10 seconds by imagining a relaxing scene. If this doesn't work, try saying the words "Don't think over and over."

Peaceful Music
A noisy place can make it hard to quickly achieve restful sleep. In addition to reducing any unnecessary or bothersome sounds, you may find that listening to soothing music like white noise.

Guided Imagery
Recalling a serene memory or imagining a peaceful setting can help reduce the stressors of the day to prepare your mind and body for sleep. Take slow, deep breaths and focus on sensory details, including sights, sounds, and smells to immerse yourself in an imagined space.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Progressive muscle relaxation uses breathing techniques combined with muscle contraction and release to alleviate bodily stress. By slowly working through all the muscle groups, progressive muscle relaxation aims to promote relaxation.

Meditation
Studies have found that meditation can help reduce cortisol, which is the hormone associated with stress. Meditation increases the natural melatonin (A hormone made by the pineal gland) levels to help with more restful sleep.

4-7-8 method
This 4-7-8 method is a traditional yoga technique. You can do this method by closing your mouth and quietly inhaling through your nose to a mental count of four. Holding your breath for a count of seven. Exhaling through your mouth, making a whoosh sound for a count of eight.

Lowering the room temperature
If your room is too warm, you might have a hard time falling asleep. Setting your thermostat to a cool temperature between 60-67°F is better for sleeping because heat exposure increases wakefulness and decreases slow wave sleep and rapid eye movement sleep.

Reading a book.
Reading books can be relaxing and may help prevent anxious thought patterns that could interfere with a person's sleep. A 2021 randomized trial study examining the impact of bedtime reading on sleep showed that sleep improved for 5-22% more people in the intervention group that read before bed compared to the control group that did not.

Take A Warm Bath or Shower
The hot water helps change your body's core temperature so that you go to bed with a lower temperature. A drop in temperature helps signal to the body that it's time for bed.

Do some physical activity
Exercise also raises your core body temperature. Elevation in core body temperature signals the body clock that it's time to be awake. After about 30 to 90 minutes, the core body temperature starts to fall.

Healthy Sleep Duration

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that you get the following hours of sleep for a good health and an active day.

Age Group	Recommended Sleep Duration
1-3 years	10-13 hours
4-13 years	9-11 hours
14-17 years	8-10 hours
18-25 years	7-9 hours
26-35 years	7-9 hours
36-45 years	7-9 hours
46-55 years	7-9 hours
56-65 years	7-9 hours
66-75 years	7-8 hours
76+ years	7-8 hours

Common Sleep Deprivation Symptoms

- Headaches
- Memory problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- Paranoia
- Behavioral issues
- Stress
- Procrastination

TOO-LITTLE SLEEP

Got less than six hours of shut-eye last night? Here's what's going on in your body.

- Brain:** This time is harder to make decisions, remember things, and your reaction time is slower.
- Eyes:** Your eyes are bloodshot, your eyelids are heavy, and you have dark circles under your eyes.
- Skin:** Dry, flaky, and wrinkled skin are more noticeable.
- Appetite:** Your metabolism slows down, and your appetite goes down. Cravings and binge eating are more likely to occur.
- Immune System:** Your body has a harder time mounting a proper fight off infection.

Variables

School Night VS Weekend Night Sleep Science

School nights and weekend nights have very different sleep times and effects. In an article 9th grade students did an experiment on weekend versus school night sleep comparison. On the weekend, they found that they got an average of 1.5 hours more of sleep than on a school night. And rather than feeling tired, and sick like on a school morning, they felt fresh.

Lack Of Sleep Effects

Sleep deprivation, or sleep deficiency can have many harsh effects such as diseases. Some of the diseases that can be caused by sleep deprivation are Heart Disease, Kidney Disease, High Blood Pressure, Diabetes, Stroke, Obesity, and even depression. Sleep deprivation can even cause decreased brain function (less ability to remember, as well as less ability learn new things), memory loss, and a weakened immune system. As you can see, lack of sleep can have a lot of effects.



ALASKA CRUISE TRIP

MEDHA TALLURI'S ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCE.

When my mom told me that my family and I were going on a cruise in Alaska, a foreign state for me, I was elated. I had heard several times from my intimates that Alaska was gorgeous and thrilling. I couldn't wait! After a few days of waiting, the moment came.

We boarded the plane after one-two boring hours of security and interval. We wished to visit Seattle, also known as "Emerald City" due to its lavish greenery, so we decided beforehand that we will go to Alaska from Seattle. After two days of exploring, we took a train to Vancouver, where we got on the cruise to Alaska.

The cruise was the most amazing trip I had ever experienced. There were games, special events, and fun places to frolic. When we peered through the windows, we could occasionally spot whales breaching and glaciers inching slowly. I remember one day, the cruise stopped at a small town, allowing us to explore. We decided to travel through a forest since the views were astonishing. We had so much fun that we forgot to retrace our steps! We eventually got lost, so we had a short moment of panic before taking a detour to the harbor. Luckily, we made it to the cruise before it left.

Several days later, we had to leave. This decision was against my desire, but of course, I knew we had to. On the way back, I reminisced with my family about the trip. That journey was fun filled, adventurous, and memorable.

Alaska is a beautiful state. I feel lucky to have experienced personally. I will never forget it!

COMIC STRIP

By Akshara Madasu

