



# A Decade of Soulfree



I recently read in the Economic Times that only 20% of start-ups are able to survive for more than 5 years and only 8% manage to survive beyond 10 years. Clearly the odds are stacked against a new start-up founder. And, if the start-up is a non-profit organisation, the odds must be abysmal. Added to that, if the founder of the start-up is a quadriplegic, I'm pretty sure there are NO odds for it at all.

However, against all odds, Soulfree has not only survived for more than a decade now, it has thrived and so have our beneficiaries. Soulfree now supports more than 2100 Persons with Spinal Cord Injury who are struggling for survival below the line of poverty.

Our Soulfree INSPIRE Centre which was established in 2021, has transformed the lives of more than 125 beneficiaries and many who were bedridden for years and could hardly make eye contact are now walking with calipers and themselves employers! Actually, the transformations are so magical and miraculous that I feel blessed to be a part of it and to be a first-hand witness to everything.

There is no doubt that God's grace and the Blessings of Well-Wishers have been Abundant for Soulfree over the years and we now wish to share with you our 10<sup>th</sup> year Completion of Service Celebrations...

*Preethi Srinivasan (Founder Trustee, Soulfree)*

## Part II

## Day -9 Events (31.08.2023)

### Online Standup Comedy Show by Mr. Praveenkumar



Praveen Kumar is a Bangalore based stand-up comedian who has done about 1400 shows all around the globe. He started doing comedy on stage from his BITS Pilani days where he used to do comedy mimes and after he passed out from college there was a void. he always wanted to do something related to comedy and hence got married. But seriously he started doing stand-up comedy from 2009 onwards.

His Clean humor makes him favorite among the Corporates and family audience. His shows are suitable for the entire family. He has done 4 specials so far and currently started touring with the fifth one. He has been rated as one of the Top 10 stand-up comedians in India by Times of India and one of top 10 comics in India to look out for by IBN live. He has also been nominated for Forbes Top 100 celebrities in India.

Praveen started his online show in the evening and soon he shifted his gears to the top and we could witness some sparkling humors which was clean and enjoyable. He changed the gravity of our minds and the residents thoroughly enjoyed the show on the whole. The show went for 45 mins.

## Day - 10 Events (1<sup>st</sup> Sep.2023)





### **Satsang - Vocal & Flute by SreeTej and group (The Art of Living)**

Music has always an upper edge among the resources of 'Healing Therapy'. 'Satsang' conducted by SreeTej and group from 'The Art of Living' today evening at the Centre proved to be an outstanding event, for each and every one of the audiences of the show got bonded to the magnetic performance of Sree Tej and his group.



He was supported by Vaseegran on his magical flute. Vocal rendering by SreeTej supported by flute and Tabla music made the atmosphere divine. Depression, worries, negative thoughts were all swept away in the Music flood that gushed into our minds and ears. SreeTej also gave 'capsules' on the dual nature of mind and the means of having a control over it. A small and interesting activity to test the presence of our mind was executed by SreeTej and it was carried out with more fun and humor. The involvement of the audience in the program (residents, co-residents and staff members) was overwhelming and there can be no second opinion on the fact that each and every one of us felt 'New and rejuvenated'.

Mr. Suresh Rajagopalan presented a small gift bag to Mr. SreeTej as a token of appreciation and respect on behalf of Soulfree INSPIRE Centre and the Managing committee at the end of the show. This Sathsangam will be green in the memories of the residents and co-residents and sure to enrich their minds whenever they think of this unforgettable day in their life.



### **Day 11 – Events (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023) Kreeda Games**

Traditional South Indian indoor games like Palankuzhi, Dhayakattam etc. have been largely lost in this android era but the team from Team from Kreeda Games is keeping it alive. Headed by Mrs. Rukumani the special event for the day was a day full of interesting indoor games curated by a passionate team that kept our residents and co-residents excited and engaged throughout.



## Day 12 – Events (3<sup>rd</sup> September 2023)

On the auspicious occasion of Maha Sankatahara Chaturthi, a project that was nearly 2 years in the making, finally fructified thanks to the support of Pramod Swami from Mata Amritanandamayi ashram.

From the Shilpa Kala Kendra she runs, renowned artists worked for nearly a full month to complete a unique and grand Idol of Lord Ganesha (Sankatahara Vinayakar).





Everyone at the Centre was present as the inauguration was done by our Managing Trustee Mrs Vijayalakshmi



Srinivasan. The idol symbolises the removal of all obstructions and barriers, while simultaneously infusing positive energy, healing and upliftment from all difficulties.

The function went very well with special poojas and offerings such as Laddu were distributed to all the residents, coresidents and staff members who witnessed the occasion. Most of all, our wheelchair accessible Ganesha ensures that all wheelchair users and people in general can do a circum-ambulation without any barriers.

### **Post Lunch Session – Light Music Session By Sudharshan And Family**

Following the special occasion, it was time for some relaxing music from Sudharshan & Team.

Mr Sudarshan is a senior IT professional at IBM. His deep empathy and friendship with Preethi spurred him to inspire his previous IBM bandmembers as well as his family members to perform for our residents and co-residents. They sang Movie Classics and having planned ahead of time, they curated a perfect list from the “favourites” of our residents and co-residents.



## Day 13 - Events (4<sup>th</sup> September 2023)

**Chief Guest: Mrs. Meera Nagarajan (Editor & Director 'Kalyanamalai'), Mr. Raja, Talk shows Speaker**

On the eve of World Spinal Cord Day, our special Invitees for the day were the most popular celebrities of Tamil Nadu, Mrs. Meera Nagarajan, MD and CEO of Kalyanamalai Matrimony and the famous Public Speaker, Mr. Raja more popularly known as 'Pattimandram Raja'.

Despite tremendously busy schedules and having returned from Singapore just that morning, they chose to travel all the way to our centre and spent nearly half the day with us. This blessing was possible because they felt a special connection with our founder, Preethi Srinivasan.

Mr Raja is known for his wit and humour in his speech, but he said that he was speechless and despite the tremendous transformative work that was happening at the Soulfree INSPIRE Centre, his heart felt heavy, because until he saw the Centre, he never knew such a world existed.







September 5 marks World Spinal Cord Injury Day and we started off the day with nearly 100 Persons with Spinal Cord Injury along with other team members and supporters on an Awareness Rally. Through the busiest streets of Thiruvannamalai, slogans were carried and Flyers were distributed emphasizing the importance of Spinal cord and how a spinal cord injury can alter the life of an otherwise normal individual. The Awareness rally ended on a positive note with the theme of “Enabling PositivelyAbled the right to Living”.



The rally was just the beginning of a 3 day “Grand Finale” of our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, which was also the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of our Annual Reunion Event “Maathiyosi” meant to help us “think differently” about our own socio-cultural narratives and encourage lasting social change and consequently “Be the Change” we wish to see in the world around us.

Over the next 3 days, Free Medical Diagnostics, Testing and Treatment were made available to all the attendees from as many as 12 departments including everything from cardiology, dermatology to dentistry.



## Day 14 Evening

### Chief Guest: Mr. Srinivas Iconic Playback Singer

On 5<sup>th</sup> evening, the iconic singer Mr Srinivas graced the Soulfree INSPIRE Centre with his presence and with his extraordinarily melodious voice. We would love to thank our Managing Committee Member Mrs Rajalakshmi Rajesh for being instrumental in bringing Mr Srinivas and supporting our activities in more ways than we can name.



Mrs Rajalakshmi anchored an extraordinary Q&A session graphing Mr Srinivas' extraordinary success as a playback singer. Mr Srinivas sang from his soul and the day was completed with a celebration of our founder's birthday – it made her year to have Mr Srinivas singing the “Happy Birthday” for her along with all the members of the Soulfree family!

## Day 15 – Events (6<sup>th</sup> September 2023)

### Chief Guest: Mr. S K P Karuna, Chairman of SKP Engineering College, Tiruvannamalai

While medical testing, sports and other events were starting to gain momentum on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Maathiyosi, our special guest was a true son of the soil, Thiruvannamalai's iconic industrialist SKP Karuna. After seeing all



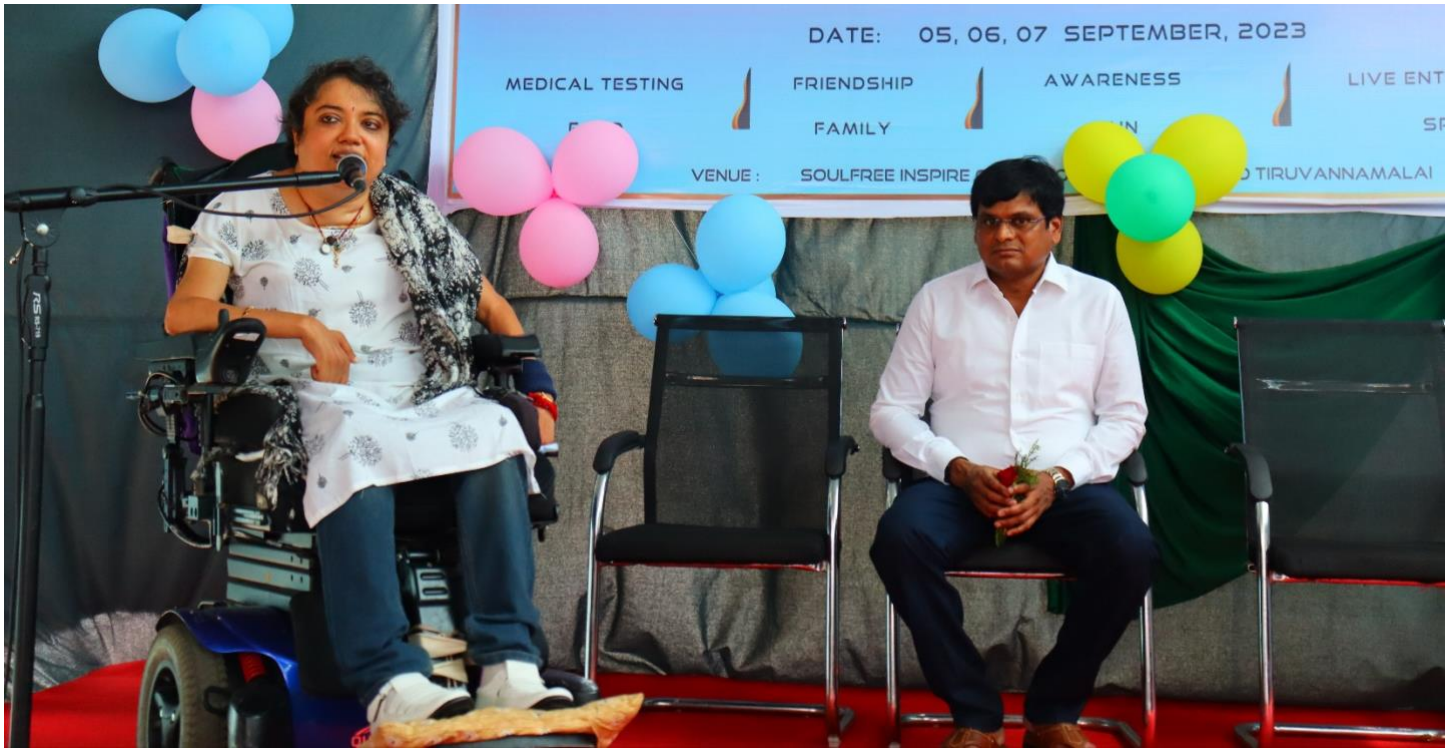
the activities and the transformative impact of the work happening at the Soulfree INSPIRE Centre he promised to support in many ways including spread the word amongst other industrialists and policymakers.

He also promised to increase community engagements from students in his own group of educational institutions for project-work, internships et cetera

After a request from our founder to make all his educational institutions more inclusive by providing ramps and elevators for wheelchair users and also to implement a 4% quota for providing admissions to Persons with Disabilities. He said he would definitely start working on this, and that he



would also speak to other Educationists to be more aware of the needs of Persons with Disabilities.



Doctor Karthikeyan, a leading PMR specialist and member of our Managing Committee was also present to provide his expert guidance to our beneficiaries. He also spoke evocatively regarding the extraordinary Soulfree Journey of our founder, Preethi Srinivasan had undertaken largely alone.



He candidly expressed that he had been quite skeptical about her vision when he had first seen the dilapidated building. He said that in his mind she had achieved more than he could despite being fully able bodied and having such great expertise as a doctor, purely because of her single-minded focus to help others.



Soulfree and Preethi are ever grateful to great experts like Doctor Karthikeyan and leaders in society, who have made the Soulfree effort in success because of the belief in and support the cause.

### **Day 16 - Events (7<sup>th</sup> September 2023)**

#### **Special Invitee: Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Hon'ble Health Secretary of Tamil Nadu**

As a divine blessing, on the very last day of our Maathiyosi and the 10<sup>th</sup> year celebration function, the Honourable Health Secretary of Tamil Nadu, Thiru Gagandeep Singh Bedi paid a surprise visit to the Soulfree INSPIRE Centre. While it was supposed to be a quick visit, he was so moved by Preethi's sincere



commitment and the attention to detail in the creation of a cost-effective, holistic framework for the integrated rehabilitation of Persons with Spinal Cord Injury that he ended up spending nearly half an hour and visiting every room of the Centre. He said that he was very impressed and touched by the effort and would support Soulfree in any way possible.

Preparations for guests, beneficiaries and the entire event management for a two-week span of time is complex and challenging to say the least. Bringing valued guests from big cities like Chennai to travel all the way to Thiruvannamalai is definitely not easy.

Despite extraordinary challenges, the entire Soulfree Team had worked exceptionally hard to ensure that everything from the stage and sound setup to cleanliness of the entire facility to the overall logistical management of the event a success.

It was time for hard work, sacrifices and good performances throughout the year to be rewarded in the form of “Awards”. Our best success stories were given “Best Butterflies” awards to signify their metamorphosis. Our staff various departments were appreciated by our founder and given special awards. Our sponsors, the various teams of medical experts and other volunteer groups that had made our 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Maathiyosi program an overwhelming success were all thanked from the heart. The winners of various sports and other events were all given trophies to showcase their triumph.

Finally, our founder, Preethi spoke spontaneously and from the heart, thanking all the staff and the entire team of supporters for fulfilling her dream, because without their hard work and dedication, she would not people to accomplish much at all. Everyone was deeply touched and happy.



The grand finale was a powerful performance by a professional band of musicians sponsored by the Dhyana Network, filling the hearts of all the attendees with love, gratitude and joy. Many would have loved the festivities to continue, but all good things need to end and this ending also came with an invitation to participate in next year's Maathiyosi – so the celebration of change continues...







**SOULFREE – Enabling PositivelyAbled Living and Acting as a True Agent of Change in the World**

