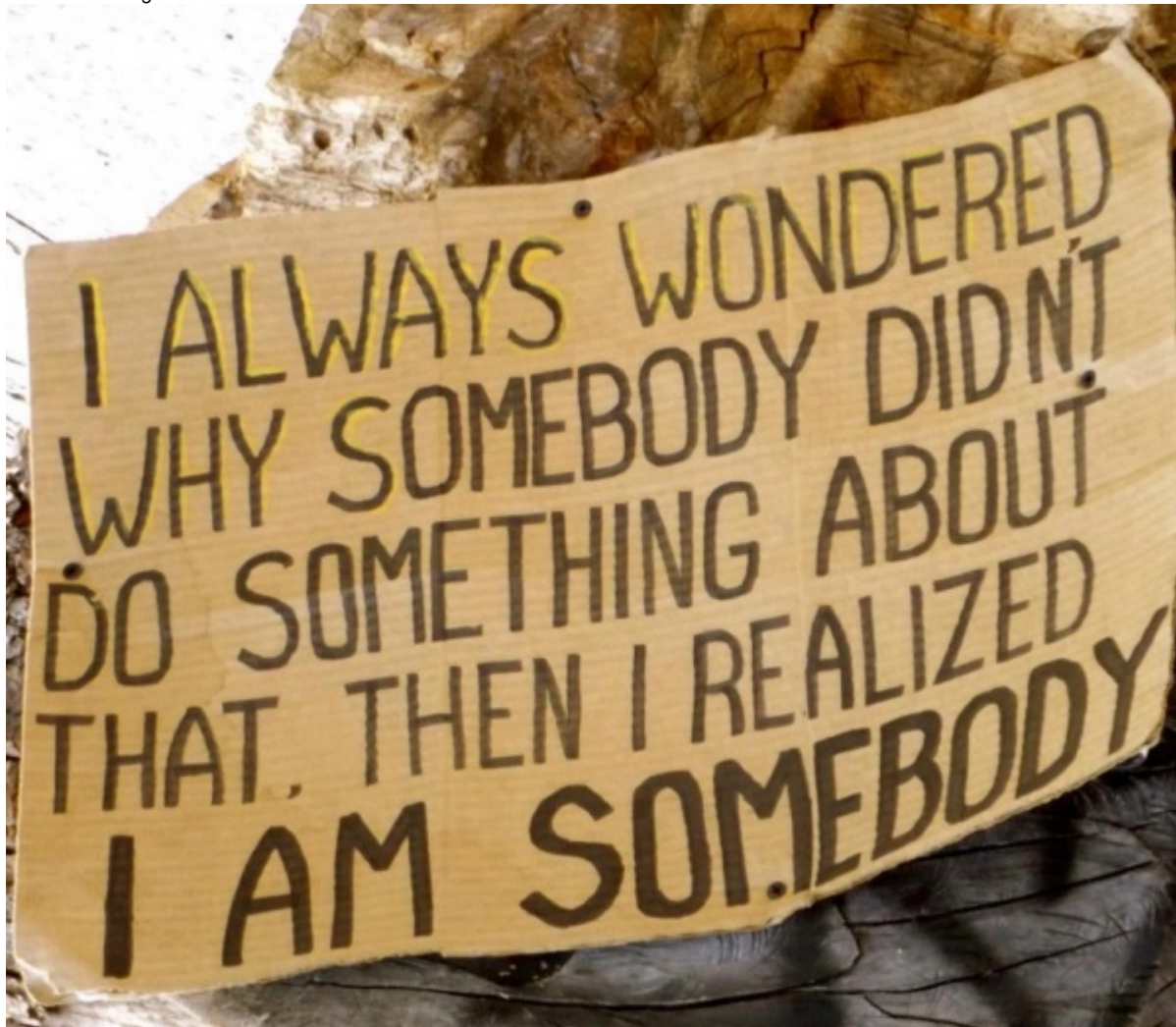


Whitefield Rising: Making the change happen

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In February 2013, a resident went to R.K. Misra with a plea to save an old tree from being cut. Misra replied, "I can save one tree but what about the rest? Strength comes only from citizens uniting." That's what started it all. The first meeting saw an attendance of 50 residents and from there on, the movement Whitefield Rising took off.



The residents formed focus groups to brainstorm and address matters of top importance to people living and working in Whitefield. The list includes Water, Garbage, Lakes, Traffic, Stray Dogs, Education, Trees, Pollution, Governance, Grievances and more. Each group learns about issues facing the society, seeks out Subject Matter experts around the world, understand the governing law and agencies responsible, learn from experiments in other cities and then present possible solutions back to community members in a simple manner, either as awareness or as calls for action. The team works on a 'Spoke and Wheel' model. At the center are two individuals, while the end of each spoke denotes a leader for each area of focus. While there are 50 core members, the number of members and supporters has crossed the 10,000 mark. Ritu George from the group talks to The Alternative and tells more about their journey. The projects A survey helped the team to prioritize and come out with different plans to combat major issues they face in the community. "We really want the community out and taking on all challenges close to their heart. It could be making a difference in someone's life or preserving our heritage. Anything that interests anyone here," George said. Model Street: A 4 km stretch is cleared of garbage, fine tuning the processes so it can be replicated across Whitefield. This is being done in partnership with BBMP and involves working with Pourakarmikas, the contractor awarded the cleaning job, the shopkeepers, the residents of side streets, etc. The 3 month project will end in September, 2013. 7 Star Survey: A standard they have put together to assess the efficiency of segregation in communities. This will ultimately go to reduce the amount of garbage generated, thereby helping all. Eat Your Street: A first of its kind in India model, it helps turn black spots into "edible" green spots by encouraging people to grow their own vegetables in their private gardens. This has been gaining traction around the world. [Staff Welfare](#): Called 'Arivu Naalivu Koota', the group focuses on imparting valuable information to the staff many people employ (maids, drivers, gardeners, etc.) so we can foster a beautiful give and take and attempt to improve all our lives. Hygiene, medical care, superstitions, financial planning, women and respect, alcoholism and the like are all part of this initiative. They have piloted this project in one community and hope to extend it to the others.

Water Awareness

: People are consuming way more than they should and learning to conserve/reuse is the main focus at this time. For this purpose, they've gathered local data relevant to the residents in order to implement water conservation habits. [Government Schools](#): A group of volunteers teaches at 5 local government schools, as well as assess their needs and provide more support. Stray Dogs: Whitefield Rising hopes to enable sterilizing of the local strays eventually lowering the count in



our area. They are looking for a leader for this team.
NGO Support

: The group plans to review all the NGOs in Whitefield so that they can lend their time, money and/or donate if they are drawn to any of them. [Sustainable Living](#): They also keep a repository of resources to promote sustainable living as much as possible in Whitefield. For instance, many folks are growing their own food on terraces and are very willing to share tips and tricks and help others get started. There are stores like Nisarga that stock great local products and organic produce that are chemical free and also work out from an economic perspective. People just need to know about them. The uniqueness of the project The community's expenses are all borne by well meaning individuals, which bring the initiative much more closer to the people. The demographics: Well traveled, well educated people that have seen citizen participation/CSR work in other countries and understand its value. Some strong, well-known leaders: RK Misra, Sunita Maheshwari, Nooraine Fazal, CEO's of many MNCs, Entrepreneurs and the like. Communication: Social Media and e-communications gets the message out fast. **The Model Itself**: A recognition that each individual can participate in any way they want to, as much or as little and for as long as they want to make all the difference. Those that are deeply involved are feeling so rewarded and satisfied. The groups themselves are full of camaraderie and hard work with so much fun thrown in. Ultimately, you find that you've gained much more than you've given. Large amounts have been needed only for things like Waste Bins for which BBMP has intent to fund. The community is looking at registering into a formal body or partnering with Rotary and tapping into CSR. How is the community involved? Many people in the community already have a passion to give back to where they live. They have come forward to contribute in various fields, be it waste management, water related issues, reviving lakes, educating the government school children, tackling traffic issues etc. This is their movement and Whitefield will get to wherever they all take it, and not just a handful of members. The WFR team sends across mails and uses their Facebook group which now has more than 850 members for more involvement, with a new website on the way.



The biggest challenges

One challenge the group faces is to impressing upon the minds of the residents of Whitefield that they have it in their hands to make a difference without having to turn activists and invest huge amounts of time or money. Encouraging leadership, with the "Tree" issue the group just needs one individual who signs up to say, "Give me some resources and I will figure out where to take us." There is no dearth of successes elsewhere, as demonstrated by the residents of Koramangala 3rd Block who ensure that their old trees won't see the axe. Understanding how to have a dialogue with the government, collaborate and get things done in

partnership is another challenge. This is followed by actually getting the government agencies to impose fines on those who don't follow the law. Littering, bad driving, encroaching, illegal borewells – all become a collective bane and unless strict action is taken, these will continue. What the future holds Their main aim is to provide a platform for people to exercise responsible citizenship. Then it is entirely up to their free will. "At least they can no more complain over a dinner conversation at the state of affairs and how the government has not done its bit," George says. For then one can ask "What have you done for your country?" Pic courtesy: Whitefield Rising First Published on the website of [The Alternative](#)