

Foundation Promotes Education for Sikh Youth

An effort to help deserving Sikh students has become a major project that aids bright and needy young persons to realise their dreams. The Sikh Human Development Foundation (SHDF), a US-based non-profit and non-political organisation, was started in 1999 by a few Sikh NRIs to help fellow Punjabis. Today, it has a beneficiary in almost every district of Punjab.

Dr Rajwant Singh, a member of the foundation was in India last year to organise a function to honour eminent Sikhs in India, said, "The SHDF is inspired by the concept of seva (service) in Sikh religion, selfless service to humanity".

At a fundraiser, Umeedan Di Shaam, held in 2008 in the USA, the foundation collected \$ 2 lakh for needy students in Punjab.

According to Dr Rajwant Singh, in the academic year 2007-2008 the foundation awarded around 200 scholarships, bringing the total to 780. "There has been a rise in the number of scholarships granted each year starting with 22 in 2000, when the scheme was started".

Out of the 200 scholarships awarded last year, 53 per cent went to male students and 47 per cent to female. Among the recipients, 62 per cent scholarships were given to students from rural areas and 38 per cent to those from towns and cities.

The scholarships are for engineering, information technology, nursing, medicine and health, agriculture, business management, bio-tech, law and food science. These students joined 96 different institutions, 81 being in Punjab and the rest in Haryana, J&K and Delhi.

Over half the scholarships were given to students from families with incomes less than 1 dollar per day per person. In fact, more than half of the students in this group come from families with incomes of less than 60 cents per day per person, Dr Rajwant disclosed. He said another 25 per cent of the students were from families with incomes of less than one and half dollars per day per person.

The grants from the Foundation have also gone to a number of children of widows, terminally-ill parents, drivers, labourers, pensioners and the like. Managed by senior professionals in Washington, the SHDF core team comprises Amar Jit Singh Sodhi, chairman, a retired IAS officer, Gajinder Singh Ahuja, general secretary, Surinder Singh, treasurer, Veena Oberoi, Harbax Singh Sethi and Dr Rajwant Singh, all members. The team tours India frequently to reach out to students, especially in rural areas.

Details of the scholarship for the needy can be viewed at the SHDF website: www.sikhhumandevlopment.org

