

On top

## CHILD'S PLAY

*Educationist LINA ASHER, founder and chairperson of Kangaroo Kids and Billabong High, talks about her passion to shape young minds*

>> SAVIA RAJAGOPAL

### **Branded education is a new concept in India. How did you go about setting it up?**

I didn't set out to create a brand. That happened by default. My goal was to bring an ideal form of education to India. When I came into the market, the whole pre-school segment was into testing. I decided beforehand to create a niche. I wanted to prove that practical education is the best practice.

### **Did you always intend to be a teacher?**

When I was studying my teaching degree in Australia, my parents sent me to India for a year because they thought I was losing touch with my roots. I taught at a school here which had 60 kids in a class. I realised that 60 kids making even the minimum noise, can drive you batty! [Laughs] I had no sense of creativity as everything was based on rote. The ranking system was demoralising for kids. I returned to complete my degree knowing that I would come back here and set up a school. Obviously, to get funding was a challenge. My dream was to start with pre-school and get into the highschool sector later.

### **What are the challenges you faced?**

It was a huge learning curve that I had to go through with respect to understanding the bureaucratic set-up, getting permissions, etc. Personally, I've grown up, saying I won't walk the well-treaded path. There wasn't a tremendous sense of financial insecurity because the first school was set up on an interest-free loan. But I had to ensure enough cash flow even though I didn't understand finance. I started in 1992 with just 10 kids. We may not be able to boast of 300 schools but we can say we have 57 of the best ones. I have schools spread all across the country now. They are affiliated to the University of Cambridge and a school in Australia.

### **How lucrative is teaching as a profession?**

Education has taken off in a big way. So teachers are at an advantage. They don't have to slink in and say 'once a teacher, always a teacher'. They can take on leadership roles, or get into coordination, managing franchise initiation, development, etc in my institutes. If we find teachers who have high interest levels and are passionate about the impact they can have on children's lives, everything else can be taught. We keep training our teachers, in terms of soft skill workshops, etc. **How would you describe your**

### **role now?**

I take more of an inspirational and creative role to the organisation. I take a backseat as far as administration is concerned.

## SUCCESS ROUTE

**Keep an open mind to learning, it's lifelong!**

**Create a niche.**

**Be open to experimentation.**

**Be focussed.**

**Take an interest in finances or get someone who knows it thoroughly.**

