

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2007-08

1. Introduction

The past financial year was a jubilee of sorts, as it was now already the tenth year since the formation of the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) and while the first half of the year was mainly marked by attempts to overcome the problems inherited from the previous year the second half allowed us to focus on our main objectives again, which are giving food, shelter and education to destitute children. This was also reflected in the beginning of new admissions towards the end of that year.

2. Activities:

(i) General – The financial year 2007-2008 was already the tenth year since the ASKMSC was founded and registered in 1998 and after one decade of service for the welfare of street children it can be considered a well recognized organisation in the field of child welfare now. Initial struggles to get established are over now and even problems that occurred in the previous year due to the removal of some criminal elements within our society could eventually be overcome this year. The Directorate of Social Welfare finally renewed our licence to run our home for street children and things came back to normal again in the second half of the year. We were therefore able to start with new admissions again and in February 2008 an eight-year-old boy named Samir Mondal was admitted from Loreto's Rainbow Shelter. This means the total number of children in our project reached 41 now. With the exception of this new admission everybody was attending school this year, but unfortunately there was a substantial drop in the performance of our boys in school.

There were no major medical problems in the past year and besides some fractures and minor injuries mainly due to sports activities the overall health of our children was good throughout the year.

Sports remained to be an integral part of our extracurricular activities and even though the playground problems of the previous year could only partly be resolved there was at least some progress in this regard again. Besides sports there was the usual activities, such as cooking class, Yoga, etc., but some new activities were also added this year.

Despite the Directorate of Social Welfare dropping its reservations against the presence of foreign volunteers in our project we did not accept any more offers by foreigners to volunteer in our project for the time being.

Co-operation with other NGOs such as CINI-Asha, PBKOJP

Boy's Home, Loreto Rainbow Shelter, etc. continued in the past accounting year and a boy from Loreto could be admitted by the end of the year.

The two major excursions of the year were once again Puri in April'07 and Kurseong in November'07 where we all were guests of the owner of Makaibari Tea Estate again. Amongst the many one-day outings the visit of the energy Education Park was the most exciting one for our children. This was due to the visit of a Swiss car powered by solar energy during the annual birthday celebration on 19th November'07, which triggered interest in environmental issues such as global warming. The annual birthday has more and more become an established cultural event of sorts, as our children are always performing an excellent program with theatre plays, dance and poetry recitations during this day.

Some foreign delegations visited our project again, amongst them once more Dr. Meyer-Hamme of the German NGO "H.E.L.G.O. e.V.". Dr. Meyer-Hamme has become a regular visitor of our project by now and is dropping in twice in a year.

(ii) Problems faced by us – One of the biggest problems of the previous year was the struggle with some criminal elements who had started a crusade against our society in order to prove their powers. This problem continued in the first half of the year, but eventually faded out and we could start concentrate on our work again.

Another big problem of the previous year was the Directorate of Social Welfare's sudden objection against the presence of foreign volunteers in our society. Particularly the presence of our respected German founder of the ASKMSC Mr. Muller had raised eyebrows with the DSW. These problems, too, could be sorted out after some further clarifications about Mr. Muller and the kind mediation of Director Sri Kanta Prasad Sinha. The DSW eventually dropped the reservations and renewed our licence to run the home in November'07. This ultimately allowed us to take in new admissions again and help some more destitute children and after a gap of almost two years an eight year old boy named Samir Mondal could be taken in from Loreto's Rainbow Shelter in February'08.

Another problem carried forward from the previous year was the lack of co-operation in our locality regarding a playground for our children. Where ever we tried to use a playground in Santoshpur for our football practice the people would eventually stop us. This could be partly solved this year by using two playgrounds in two nearby suburbs where we were rather more welcome.

Problems connected to puberty and adolescence continued and are here to stay now. While a few of the older children eventually calmed down a bit and showed some signs of reason the next batch just started to get moody and unruly.

(iii) Education – With the exception of our new admission Samir

Mondal all of our children went to school throughout the year. They went to five different schools in Kolkata and two boarding schools in Kurseong. By the end of the financial year our children were attending the following schools and classes:

Nava Nalanda School:

Class VI: Sudhir Dhopi, Suraj Dhopi.

Class V: Qutubuddin Sheikh.

Class IV: Ashim Mondal, Khokan Halder.

Nursery II: Biswajit Sarder.

A. K. Ghosh Memorial School:

Class V: Kishore Halder, Chattu Shau, Raju Chakraborty, Pintu Das.

Class IV: Biswajit Sikdar, Jagannath Das, Pradip Das, Gour Halder, Somnath Mistri, Suman Deb, Vicky Sharma.

Class III: Banti Sharma, Prabir Adhikari, Sanu Singh.

Class II: Raja Ratha.

Class I: Raquib Purkait, Bubai Yadav, Manoj Biswas.

KG II: Pintu Shaw, Sahid Naskar, Raja Das.

Apollos' Academy:

Class VI: Ajgar Sheikh.

Preparatory: Biswanath Maity, Somnath Maity.

Young Horizon School:

Class I: Chandan Das, Tapos Ghosh, Shuvendu Halder.

KG II: Ravi Yadav.

Manovikas Kendra:

SU III: Shibu Dey.

Himali Boarding School, Kurseong:

Class V: Subhasish Mondal.

Class III: Vicky Roy.

Class I: Sourav Dey.

Sunshine School, Kurseong:

Class II: Abul Sheikh.

Class I: Babu Ghosh.

While in the previous years most of our children progressed quite well in school with some of them being the first in their respective

classes, a general downtrend of the results of our children could be noted during this year. With many of our older boys being in the middle of puberty there seems to be a lack of interested in school and studies now. Further to this our children partly missed the important half yearly examinations due to an outbreak of a contagious eye disease in our society.

Jagannath Das, Biswajit Sikdar and Pradip Das who had already struggled in the previous years continued to do so, but managed to get promoted to the next class even though some of them only after special consideration.

Another boy struggling with school, Ajgar Sheikh had not been promoted to class VI in the previous year in A. K. Ghosh Memorial School and we had decided to re-admit him to Apollo's Academy where he once had started his schooling and used to be first in his class. Despite having failed class V in A. K. Ghosh Memorial School they allowed him to join class VI, but at the end of the school year he had failed once again in Mathematics and will now have to clear an additional exam in April'08 to get promoted to class VII. Two other cases struggling for promotion were Ravi Yadav in young Horizon School and Vicky Roy in Himali Boarding School in Kurseong, while our Shibu Dey who used to have difficulties in school in earlier years continued to blossom in Manovikas Kendra and with the exception of Vicky Roy all our boys in boarding schools in Kurseong also continued to do well.

(iv) Medical – There has been no major medical problem in the past year. After surgical correction of little Sourav Dey's Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD) in the previous year he had to undergo regular check-ups every 6 months to monitor his condition. No further problems were noted and the correction seems to have been a complete success.

As a result of the sports activities of our children the number of minor fractures and bruises remained high during the year with the fracture of our goalkeeper Jagannath Das' collarbone in January'08 being the worst case of all. He will probably miss training for a period of 4 months and is currently undergoing physiotherapy to recover completely.

During the rainy season we had an outbreak of a feared and highly contagious, though harmless eye disease, which is very common during that season. Unfortunately our children could not attend some of their half yearly examinations for that reason, which was one of the reasons for the poor marks of our children at the end of the school year.

Dr. Mondal a doctor of the locality continued with his monthly check-ups of our children, recording weight and height together with other health related data minutely in a health file. This way the overall improvement of the state of health of our children as well as a healthy weight gain was well documented.

(v) Sports and related Activities – Football is still the number one sport of the ASKMSC and even though we could not completely sort out our playground problems our two teams, i.e. the senior team or ‘A’-team and the junior team or ‘B’-team have both quite improved. Due to lack of co-operation in Santoshpur we are now using alternately a playground in nearby Patuli and Baghajatin respectively, but in order to let the children gain experience on a full-sized football field we organized five days of special training in Santoshpur Stadium over a period of one month in January and February’08. After the eventual renewal of our licence by the Directorate of Social Welfare we hope now, that our French youth coach Mr. Michel Sauvestre will soon join us again and help our children to improve even further their football skills. During the excursion to Kurseong we had a couple of football matches with the various boarding schools there. The highlight was the match with Goethals Memorial School. It is now planned to arrange football matches during every excursion to Puri and Kurseong.

Besides football our children participated in several athletics competitions organized by various clubs in our neighbourhood where they won many prizes and medals. Particularly our Sudhir Dhopi has proven to be the fastest runner in the neighbourhood. Over the year we also organized again some volleyball matches with the boys and staff of PBKOJP Boy’s Home.

(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music – Ever since we do have our own little courtyard a lot of sports and activities have become possible inside our own compound during the last two years. Our children play now almost daily football in that courtyard, as well as volleyball, badminton and other sports and games. Besides that we have the usual yoga, which takes place twice a week in our spacious ‘games room’. Since its introduction some years ago the cooking class is a favourite with everyone and as almost all the children are now capable to prepare a meal it has made excursions, e.g. to Puri by a group easier since they can now prepare their own meals during the trip together with their group attendant and it is no more required to send a cook along. This is a first step towards self-sufficiency for our boys. To guide them even further towards self-reliance a tailoring class has been newly introduced, which is held once a week for each group.

As far as music and arts is concerned there is still the regular Tabla lessons and two children attend a nearby dance school. An art teacher is giving drawing lessons twice a week and once a week lessons in handicrafts. He is also taking care about preparing theatre plays with some of our children, while his wife is giving occasional singing and harmonium classes. In the winter Mrs. Ghosh once more held her free handicraft and art workshop.

(vii) Birthday – For the first time the 19th November or “birthday” of our children had been reduced to a half-day event

this year. Many of our children had an exam in school in the morning of that day and for that reason the football tournament that customarily takes place in the morning had to be shifted to the afternoon. Instead the usual afternoon games had to be curtailed with only the quiz competition remaining before the first guests arrived for the traditional evening program of music, dance, theatre, recitals and songs. This entertainment program took place this year on an elevated podium, so that even the guests in the last rows could follow the program undisturbed. The children also had arranged an exhibition of their drawings for further entertainment of their guests. As a surprise for everybody the Swiss team around Louis Palmer joined the event with their solar powered car to raise awareness about global warming. Birthday cake and snacks as always rounded up the program and another "happy birthday" came to an end.

(viii) Meals – Regarding meals there has been no change in the last year. The children are still served mainly a choice of vegetable and dal curries with rice for lunch and dinner and sometimes roti is given instead of rice. Fish curry is served every Monday and meat curry with rice and vegetables on Saturdays, which means the children get two non-vegetarian meals per week. On the other days curries with soybean flakes are offered for further protein intake. Both lunch and dinner are supplemented by salad. Milk and cereals are given in the morning and we also continue to supply the children with fruits for the daily snack break at 5 o'clock.

(ix) Excursions – Excursions to Puri in summer and Kurseong in autumn have now become a regular event for the ASKMSC again. In April/May'07 our children went to Puri in small groups, while in November'07 the entire gang went to Kurseong thanks to Mr. Banerjee, owner of the Makaibari Tea Estate who had invited us once again.

With the visit of the solar car on the birthday of the children sparking an interest in alternative energy sources and the problem of global warming in our children they eagerly went for a day-outing to visit the Energy Education Park opposite Science City. Further to this there were many other one-day excursions and outings of the different groups again. On national holidays and weekends they went together with their respective group attendant to visit museums, parks, cinema halls as well as other places.

Our annual picnic took place in February'07 and children and staff enjoyed once again a day of fun and frolic in the countryside.

(x) Volunteers – Due to the sudden objections raised by the Directorate of Social Welfare against foreign volunteers we had stopped the practice of volunteers in the previous year and even after the DSW had dropped their objections we have not encouraged new volunteers from abroad. Only those who have been regulars over the years like our respected founder Mr.

Wolfgang Muller or our arts and crafts teacher Ms. Annelies Ghosh both from Germany.

3. Finances:

Once again the financial situation of the society was very sound in the past accounting year. With funds more or less only needed for the routine day-to-day expenditure. We could therefore fully cover our costs with the help of our German sister charity the NGO "Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.". There were also, though little local contributions this year as far as money was concerned, but some local clubs as well as private donors contributed again blankets, clothes or sponsored a meal for the children. Besides that there were the annual membership fees of the members.

4. Outlook:

With the eventual renewal of our licence to run a home for street children by the Directorate of Social Welfare in November 2007 we can now look forward to the fulfilment of our objectives again. Already the first new admissions could be accommodated and it has to be now our aim to fill our home up to full capacity. This will also create new job opportunities, as more staff will be required then. Further to this we can now concentrate on finding suitable land for the third phase of our project in the countryside. It is also hoped that more efforts can be put into the development of our football academy again, which suffered from neglect due to the problems of the past.