

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2016-17

1. Introduction

The financial year 2016-17 slowly and gradually got into motion the process of separation from the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) for some of our wards. This meant once again that we had to adapt to this new situation. Financially too this continued to show as our required annual budget further decreased due to the diminishing number of dependent children and young adults. While our license problem with the *Directorate of Social Welfare* once again could not be sorted out the *Ministry of Home Affairs* has renewed our registration under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) for another five years after thorough scrutiny of our application. This will ensure our financial co-operation with our sister charity and partner in Germany the *Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.* (ali sk e.V.) and will guarantee the necessary funding for our work in the coming years.

2. Activities

(i) **General** – With our home for former street children having always been more like a family environment rather than that of an institution the process of separation from the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) seemed to be difficult for some of our young adults. Already the move from the care of our home to the rather autonomous ‘Aftercare Unit’ was a huge step for most of them. Now the prospect of having to shift to another city for job or college was an even higher mountain to climb. So while in the past we mainly had to care about a proper school education of our children the focus of our work more and more shifted towards ‘aftercare’ in the last year, i.e. we had to look more into possible opportunities for our young adults after leaving school and the protected environment of our home. While some needed assistance with choosing the right college and branch of study others needed guidance in how to find a job and how to apply for it as well as how to select the right training courses to prepare for a career in a certain professional field. Moreover it became essential to further develop the necessary skills to prepare them for a life on their own. Here it paid off that all our boys had learned cooking and other skills important for this from a very young age in our home. So we only had to encourage our young adults to manage the household of the ‘Aftercare Unit’ in Picnic Garden on their own for a first practice in this field.

As for the boys still in school another two young men sat for their higher secondary board exams at the end of the financial year while another nine attempted for their class x board exams. Results are awaited. Should they pass we would have now 13 young adults who have cleared their higher

secondary exams and including them altogether 26 who have at least successfully passed class x.

A total of 19 boys attended school with the financial support of ASKMSC throughout the year while a total of seven entered college and while another five boys turned 18 during the year only 17 boys are still left now out of the once 42 who have not reached yet adulthood.

One of the two young men who failed their higher secondary exams in the previous year had joined the French project *Life Project 4 Youth* (LP4Y) for a one year training in 'Entrepreneurship' in July'16, while the other one still plays football for a living and is independent now from the support of our NGO.

Another two of our young adults found employment with the French company *Decathlon Sports India Pvt. Ltd.* in the past year while two of our young adults enrolled for a Bachelor Degree in 'International Sports Management', which only confirms the notion of the previous year that our focus on sports over all those years has given our boys an advantage in their search for a career opportunity.

As for sports in our home it has been very football centric in the past year and our football team *FC Kolkata* continued to play tournaments and friendly matches throughout the year with various degrees of success, but it must be said that apart from that not much happened in terms of other sports.

Due to 'Demonetisation' issues coinciding with a delayed money transaction from Germany we were lacking the financial resources to celebrate our annual event on 19th November 2016 in style, but our young adults made up for this and took over the organisation of the 'Birthday' of all our children to make it a big success even with a low budget.

In another rather nice development of the past year a baking oven that was given to us in January'16 for temporary use had become very popular with our children and was eventually handed over to us for good in February'17 by its owner. This will enable us now to maybe send more young adults for baking training in the future and use the oven for them to practice their skills at home.

(ii) Problems faced by us – In the past year we were more successfully able to resolve problems with school and home drop-outs, as we could convince some of them to at least complete their secondary education through the *National Institute of Open Schooling*, NIOS. By studying at home at their own pace and completing subjects if so required one by one they were also able to go about their work and stay with their families. It turned out that two of these boys even appeared for all their subjects required to complete their secondary education at the first attempt and with one of them already having his results out we were happy to learn that he had passed all of them.

After certain adaptations and adjustments another major worry of the previous year a boy with sudden mood swings could be better integrated

into the daily life of our home again. He was even able to complete his class X CBSE board exams at the end of this financial year after the change of school at the end of the previous year. Another boy with similar problems who now stays with his mother and gets support from us was also able to finish his ICSE board exams in March' 17.

Also at the end of this past year we were forced to come to a decision regarding our children in *Ramkrishna Sarada Mission School*, as more and more news of corporal punishment particularly against our children came to our knowledge. We therefore have decided to take them out of this school and admit them to another school.

Unfortunately we could once again not resolve the license issue of many years with the *Directorate of Social Welfare*, DSW since it is not in our hands.

(iii) Education – At the beginning of the past financial year a total of ten boys studied in various boarding schools while nine attended day schools, such as *Holy Home School*, *Apollos Academy* and *Young Horizons School* or had joined the *National Institute of Open Schooling*, NIOS. Altogether this means a total of 19 children and young adults went to school with the support of ASKMSC. They attended the following schools and classes:

Apollos Academy

Class X	1
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Young Horizon School

Class X	1
Class IX	2
Class VIII	1

Holy Home Day School

Class X	1
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Sudhir Memorial Institute

Class XII	1
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Ramkrishna Sarada Mission School

Class X	3
Class IX	3
Class VIII	1

Himali Boarding School, Kurseong

Class XII	1
Class X	1

Sreepur Primary School, Ramkrishnapur

Class IV	1
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National Institute of Open Schooling

Class X	2
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In May'16 another six boys got their higher secondary results and while in the previous year two had failed this time all of them had passed, some of them with excellent results. One of the six enrolled for a Bachelor Degree in 'Sports Management' at the *National Academy of Sports Management (NASM)* in Mumbai together with one of the five who had passed HS the year before. Another one enrolled for a Bachelor Degree in 'Computer Applications (BCA)' at the *Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)*. A third one joined *Frankfinn Institute* to become a flight attendant and also took up a sponsored French language course at *Alliance Française du Bengale*, the French cultural institution in Kolkata. He is also pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in 'Tourism Studies (BTS)' with IGNOU side by side. The fourth got a job with *Decathlon Sports India Pvt. Ltd.* in Kolkata and the one who was already working for ASKMSC side by side took up his studies for a Bachelor Degree in 'Social Welfare (BSW)' also with IGNOU. The last of the six young men joined a sponsored German language course at *Max Muller Bhavan*, the German cultural institution in Kolkata, as he wants to follow in the footsteps of his brother who took the course in the previous year and had left for Germany to study 'Aeronautics'.

Of those five young men who had passed their higher secondary in the previous year two were studying in college right now, one as mentioned above in NASM in Mumbai and one abroad, two are currently working as youth football coaches and one is employed by *Decathlon Sports India Pvt. Ltd.* in Delhi since November'15. And since one of the two NASM students also got himself a part-time job with *Decathlon Sports India Pvt. Ltd.* in Mumbai, we have now already three young men from our home working for them in three different metropolises of India. This seems to confirm the notion of the previous year that the decision to run our home for former street children side by side as a sports academy has given them an extra advantage to get jobs. It is hoped that more young adults will benefit from this fact.

Two of our young adults decided last year to go for job oriented training after leaving school. One enrolled with *Frankfinn Institute* for the one year

Diploma course in 'Aviation, Hospitality and Travel Management' and the other one got a chance with the French organisation *Life Project for Youth* (LP4Y) and took up a one year course in 'Entrepreneurship'. Both are expected to complete their respective courses coming June.

One of our boys of *Sudhir Memorial Institute School*, Madhyamgram has completed his higher secondary exams at the end of the financial year and one more from *Himali Boarding School*, Kurseong is expected to complete it with a little delay in April'17, since his board has postponed some of his exams due to elections in some states of India. Furthermore another nine children have completed their class X board exams in March'17 and all results are as always eagerly expected by end of May'17 with the exception of one boy who gave his class X exams already in October'16 with the *National Institute of Open Schooling* (NIOS). His results came out already in December'16 and he passed with good results and wants to continue for his higher secondary

Also in December'16 the boy who does his primary schooling in a Bengali medium school in Ramkrishnapur completed class IV successfully and could be admitted to a very good boarding school in Nimpith run by the *Ramkrishna Mission*. Therefore the total number of our children in boarding schools went up by one and was 11 till the end of the year.

In another rather sad development repeated incidents of corporal punishment of our boys in *Ramkrishna Sarada Mission School* came to our notice and in March'17 we decided to take out our boys from this school and will most likely admit them to *Pearl Rosary Boarding School* in Serampur for the new school year. The same will be decided in a governing body meeting next month after talks with Pearl Rosary Boarding School.

(iv) Medical – For all medical problems and check-ups we nowadays send our children to nearby KPC Hospital. The hospital is very close to our home and all kinds of specialists are available there under one roof at a very nominal rate. One of our young adults was admitted there in July'16 and a heart condition was diagnosed, which should be under permanent observation in the future. In this regard it is worth mentioning that the decision to get health insurance coverage for all our children and staff a few years ago relieves us from the burden of any unexpected medical emergencies. A few days in hospital can add up to thousands of Rupees in hospital bills. The benefits of health insurance are therefore clear; it provides us with the means to look after our children and young adults, without worrying about the costs of medical emergencies.

Besides the usual minor injuries due to sport, common cold and skin problems we were fortunately untroubled by any real medical emergencies or major psychological problems in the past year.

(v) Sports and related Activities – From the start the ASKMSC has been a centre of physical activities. Whether team-based or individual, sports are a great activity for children. Sports provide a variety of benefits other than physical activity. Participation in sports can help build self-esteem

and confidence, can motivate children to excel academically and can help build social skills. Participation also can teach children the benefits of goal-setting and practice. Growing up with sports can therefore come as an advantage to compete in today's working environment and we can see that clearly in ASKMSC were all our children grew up with a multitude of sports. For example the French international retailer *Decathlon Sports* a company that has opened many branches all over India likes to recruit people for their enthusiasm and love for sports. Already three of our young adults have been hired and work in stores of the company in places like Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai. Further to this we have noticed over the years that good boarding schools in the hills like to take in and even sponsor our children for their excellence in sports! Many of our children represented their schools in sports such as football, volleyball, badminton, table tennis and more and helped their schools to win many prizes. And since some colleges even have a special quota for students who excelled in sports this could be an advantage for admission for some of our young adults who passed their higher secondary exams.

All this is a good reason to carry on with sports in our home and so the young adults from our 'Aftercare Unit' met almost daily with our remaining boys in the home to play football matches after school. Our football coach Mr. Marbyn Molina from Honduras organised training sessions 2-3 times a week and our team *FC Kolkata* played a few tournaments again all over Kolkata. Two of our young adults started to make a living out of their passion for football when they took up an assignment as youth coaches in the *Sundarban* and another one even joined a third division club. But not everything went smooth in the past year. It was a huge disappointment for one of our boys when FIFA licensed Swiss Youth Coach Mr. Christoph Gobeli of the Swiss Super League Club 'Young Boys Bern' could not succeed to bring him to Switzerland to practice for three months with his club, because problems with his visa could not be sorted out with the Swiss Embassy in time.

(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music – It is a known fact that learning combined with arts and music builds long lasting social skills and educates on tolerance, creativity and discipline. This combination when used in the work with children and young adults, helps them to develop an ability for better self-expression, building up confidence, concentration, integration in the group, developing imagination, recognizing good and beautiful and hence increases their chances for success in life. Music is very close to the emotional nature of children and therefore can stimulate and develop their mental and physical abilities. For all these reasons arts and music have always been an integral part of our home from the very beginning and that is way listening to or making their own music is still one of the number one activities for all of our children during leisure hours and further to this some of our children still ask for arts material to be creative on their own. But since we had no real substitute for the traditional arts & crafts

workshop organised for so many years by Annelies & Gora Ghosh over the winter months, we organised long game sessions instead last winter and particularly *Ludo* competitions combined with some easy to listen background music and cookies and cakes from our own baking oven served along with it became the special craze of the winter. And for those who wanted to escape into a world of their own there was always our well-stocked library for further entertainment in order not to allow boredom to set in.

(vii) Birthday – While other NGOs commemorate the day they came into existence with an annual foundation day celebration, we at ASKMSC give the most importance to the day our first ten street children were able to move into our then newly built home in Santoshpur on 19th November 2000 and since none of our boys knew when exactly he was born, we decided to celebrate this very day every year as the birthday of all our children.

Like in the year before the entire day was organised by the boys themselves who planned and prepared everything together. Some of the young adults took the responsibility and practiced for weeks before the event with their younger ‘brothers’ for the planned entertainment programme of theatre, songs and recitations. The ASKMSC in-house band *The Backbenchers* rehearsed almost daily and who ever had completed ten years in the home was busy writing a little speech for the event to express his feelings about it. And when the day finally came almost everybody had come even the alumni. The house was decorated for the occasion and the morning started with a football match between the ‘Aftercare Unit’ and the boys from the home. After a delicious lunch and the usual games in the afternoon the first guests dropped in, mainly from *PBKOJP Boy’s Home* and so the evening programme started. A couple from the locality handed out new blankets for the winter and other gifts between the show and the highlight of the day was a birthday cake in the shape and the colours of the crest of our football club *FC Kolkata*. And in the end a splendid dinner rounded up this beautiful day!

(viii) Meals – Besides the daily breakfast and afternoon snacks we serve two main rice meals with dal and curries everyday. These main meals consist on three days of the week of rice, dal and egg curry which is either served for lunch or dinner. On two days of the week it is rice, dal and fish curry and once a week we serve rice with chicken curry. All other meals are served with dal and vegetable curries enriched with soybean flakes for additional protein intake. Vegetables vary as per the season, but there is always a well balanced diet throughout the year. There are cereals with milk or butter toast with jelly for breakfast and the children get a ‘school tiffin’ to fight back the hunger until the first main rice meal is served. Everyday fruits are given during the afternoon snack break for vitamin intake and to bridge the time until dinner.

(ix) Excursions – Once again there was not much activity in terms of excursions and daytrips in the past year, but since two of our young adults work as youth coaches now to promote football in the Sundarbans there were frequent stays of some or all of our boys in the Sundarbans for practice sessions or football tournaments.

(x) Volunteers – It is said that volunteering has positive benefits for the volunteer as well as for the person or community served. It has therefore always been an integral part of our project, where volunteers have worked in many different areas in the past. Various aspects of running a home for former street children, such as tuitions and courses in arts, sports, music, organising, housekeeping, administration and many more were actively supported or even entirely managed by voluntary workers from India and abroad. Many of them have come over the years and have helped on a regular basis. So this year too some old regulars had come to help for some time or had been here to support us throughout the year. One of them is Mr. Wolfgang Muller from Germany who founded the ASKMSC in memory of his late friend Ali Salem Khalifa and actively supports it from the very beginning and there is of course Mr. Marbyn Molina from Honduras who has also been here for many years to help with the football training and fitness of our boys. Both have become more than just volunteers for our children who look up to them for life guidance and advice.

Further to these two permanent volunteers there are those who come on a regular basis every year for a certain time, amongst them FIFA licensed Youth Coach Mr. Christoph Gobeli from Switzerland who was here again this year, as well as Mr. & Ms. Otremba from Germany and Ms. Karolina Gummerer from Italy. Even Mr. Gora Ghosh came again for a short visit, although without his wife. And as every year we would like to thank all the mentioned and unmentioned volunteers for their contribution and help!

(xi) Aftercare Unit – The new ‘Aftercare Unit’ in Picnic Garden for our 18 years and above young adults established in September 2015 has become a successful steppingstone for our youths, as young adults have left from here to join jobs or college all over India or even abroad. The autonomous ‘Unit’ has a changing number of roommates and is run by the youths who organise their daily chores such as cooking, house cleaning, shopping, etc., on their own. At any given day of the past year five to ten young men stayed there and received support and life guidance from our main branch in Santoshpur as and when required.

3. Finances

In the past financial year our project was once again almost entirely financed by our sister charity and partner in Germany the *Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.* with some local contributions

mainly restricted to sponsored meals and the annual membership fees of our society members.

As a result of the decision of the 59th Governing Body Meeting of the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* held on 07 April 2013 to reduce to zero the number of children supported by us as long as the license issue with the DSW is not resolved the annual budget has now declined for the third year in a row in accordance with the declining number of children in the same period. With no solution of the license problem in sight this process is expected to continue in the future.

4. Outlook

The process of separation from the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* for some of our wards will intensify in the coming year and we will have to continue to provide maximum support and guidance to make it as smooth a ride as can be for them. Further to this we are planning a total renovation of our home in Santoshpur by the end of October'17 when the number of inmates has probably come down to almost zero. After the completion of this renovation work it is planned to step up our efforts to find a solution for the license problem with the *Directorate of Social Welfare* to enable us to start with an entirely new generation of destitute children in the future.