

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2001-02

- 1. Introduction** Once again the Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children (ASKMSC) could fulfil its objects to provide food, shelter and education to orphaned, abandoned and other children in need by admitting 14 more children within this year. A total of 22 children have found a place in our first home for street children by now.
- 2. Activities:**
- (i) General** – In the previous year it was our major concern to get our first ten children admitted to formal schools. Under the careful guidance of our teaching staff the children improved so well in English, Bengali as well as simple Maths and General Knowledge, that we decided to try to admit them to an English Medium School. In April 2001 they set for the entrance test and all could be admitted. In the same month we eventually received the license to run a home for children from the Directorate of Social Welfare under the West Bengal Women’s and Children’s Institutions (Licensing) Rules, 1958, for which we had applied in the month of October of the previous year.
- After completing the third year since the registration of the ASKMSC under the West Bengal Society Registration Act, 1961, the registration with the Central Government under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976 for the acceptance of foreign contribution was applied for in the months of August 2001. Meanwhile a delegation from the British NGO “A.S.K. Children’s Trust” visited our project and promised financial support in the future. Shortly after the registration with the Central Government under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976, was granted on 14 December 2001 another NGO from Italy showed interest in our project and eventually sent a delegation in February 2002. But throughout the year the German NGO “Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens Strassenkinder e.V.” remained the major financial support for the project.
- The co-operation with CINI-Asha continued within the last 12 months, but further contacts with other NGOs working in the same field could be established, too. A total of 14 new children were admitted to the ASKMSC of which 2 children were admitted by CINI-Asha, 5 more children from SANLAAP, 3 children from OFFER, one child from “Voice of People” and 3 children from independent sources. Not all children were street children. Some were from slum areas, rural poor or from the red light district. The following 14 new children could be accommodated:

Asim Mandal, 6 years

Banti Sharma, 5 years
Biki Sharma, 6 years
Bubai Yadav, 3 years
Gour Halder, 5 years
Jagannath Das, 7 years
Kishore Halder, 6 years
Khokan Halder, 7 years
Pappu Sekh, 8 years
Raju Chakraborty, 7 years
Ravi Yadav, 4 months
Sanu Singh, 3 years
Shibu Dey, 3 years
Suman Deb, years

Some more children were admitted within the year, but ran away again. Of those the majority was street children directly admitted by ASKMSC staff, but also one child admitted by CINI-Asha. Another setback faced by the society was the demand by relatives of Raju Mandal and Kutubuddin Sheikh who wanted their children to be returned. Both belonged to the first batch of ten children who were already going to school. Kutubuddin's father later readmitted his son, but Raju Mandal is now a street child at Sealdah Station again. Another child of the first batch, Dhaniram Halder, who was also already going to school ran away due to pressure in school and has also returned back to his previous life in the street.

Besides that the ASKMSC could not make any progress regarding the construction of the second home for street children, but was able to finish on-going work on the first building. The ASKMSC was also able to purchase another plot of land next to its existing properties. This land is planned to be a playground for the children in the future.

(ii) Background of our Children – Whereas in the last year all our children were street children from Sealdah Railway Station who survived mainly by begging in the station or on the trains many of our children admitted within this year were from different backgrounds. Only three children were street children from Sealdah. All the others were not living on the street, but in very poor and unhealthy environments such as slums or red light areas. Some of them were already going to slum schools before they came to us. Although referred to us by various NGOs, they were directly admitted from a relative or relatives who could not further afford to look after the child due to economic reasons.

(iii) Problems faced by us – In the past year we faced a new problem. A few children ran away again shortly after the admission to our institution. This mainly happened with children brought directly from the street by our staff, but also in one case with a child referred to us by CINI-Asha. These children could probably not adjust to a new life in our institution, as they were

not used to follow a routine. Unfortunately also one of our stable children, Dhaniram Halder, ran away after problems in school and is now back to his previous life living in Sealdah Station again. All attempts to bring him back have failed. Two other children, Raju Mandal and Kutubuddin Sheikh, were claimed back by their relatives who once had abandoned them. Raju was given back to his grandmother who is a homeless living in Sealdah Station and is now back to his life as a rag-picker. Kutubuddin was given back to his father who is an alcoholic. Fortunately Kutubuddin could convince his father to readmit him to our institution after more than one month staying with his father.

(iv) Education – In April 2001 our first 10 children set for admission test with Apollo's Academy, Santoshpur and were admitted to the following classes:

Nursery II: Chattu Das, Kutubuddin Sheikh, Pintu Das, Pradip Das, Raju Mandal.

Preparatory Class: Ajgar Sheikh, Biswajit Sikdar, Sudhir Dhopi, Suraj Dhopi.

Class IV: Dhaniram Halder.

While the majority of the children progressed well in school and even became the best in their respective classes two children, Biswajit Sikdar and Dhaniram Halder, faced difficulties, despite our teaching staff helping with the homework and studies after school and when ever required. In the case of Biswajit Sikdar moving him to Nursery II from Preparatory Class could solve the problem. He is now doing fine. But Dhaniram Halder felt alienated in his class and could not follow the syllabus. Moreover the other children were teasing him because of his poor results. In the cause of time he lost all his motivation to study. When he eventually ran away on the morning following the first day in school after the summer holidays it was probably due to this pressure.

Another special case was Kutubuddin Sheikh who missed school for more than one month because his father had demanded him back only to readmit him again later on. Fortunately Kutubuddin had no problems whatsoever to reintegrate into his class and even went on to finish his school year being first in his batch.

Side by side with the school going children the newly admitted children had to be prepared for admission to school in the coming year. For this reason a second teacher was employed, so that the school going and non-school going children could be taught separately. Most of the newly admitted children improved fast learning the alphabets and numbers in English and Bengali as well as simple Maths and General Knowledge. But a few might need one to one coaching if they are to be admitted to school.

(v) Medical – A doctor of the locality has been hired for monthly check-ups of our children and when ever a health problem occurs. Besides that all of our children are screened for HIV when admitted. During the monthly check-ups weight and height together with other health related data is noted down 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 could be well documented. The children also undergo a regular vaccination program for their general immunisation. In the month of February Gour Halder got an extra finger on his right hand removed by surgery.

(vi) Sports and other Activities – This year, too, physical exercise continued to be an important part of the daily routine, but the number of days for Karate training and morning walk had to be reduced. Instead the children play more often football or cricket in the afternoon. Some of our children participated in Karate competitions and/or games and won several trophies.

(vii) Leisure – In their free time our children play under the attention of our staff. We provide toys and board games for this purpose, but also give them the opportunity to play outdoor games such as cricket and football.

(viii) Meals – We continue to supply the children regularly with breakfast after morning sports, lunch and dinner as well as a daily milk and biscuit break at 5 o'clock.

(ix) Excursions – This year, too, we did quite a few excursions with our children as we consider it an important change from the daily routine. For that reason and on the special request of our children we once again went to “Aquatika” in September 2001 and another time in March 2002. We also did a few outings to the countryside to enjoy nature and to have a picnic. Two other highlights for the children were a visit to Science City and a day trip to Diamond Harbour.

(x) Volunteers – Despite an increase in the number of our paid staff we also depend on voluntary services from local people and people from abroad. Besides helping with the education of the children and their daily routine they also entertain them and present them with gifts, toys and clothes.

3. Finances:

The past year was a major improvement on the financial side of the ASKMSC, even so some incidents of shortage of funds occurred. The co-operation with the German NGO “Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.” which is a main source of funds for the ASKMSC continued. After another prior permission of the Central Government under Section 6(1A) of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976, to receive a further

amount from the German NGO was granted the ASKMSC was eventually able to obtain the final registration with the Central Government under the said Act. At the same time the policy of the ASKMSC to get mainly in touch with foreign donor organisations via the Internet started to pay off. For this purpose the ASKMSC had established an Internet presence in 1998 giving information about goals and objectives of the society as well as progress reports on its website. This way the ASKMSC established contact with another NGO in the UK, the “ASK Children’s Trust” which sent a delegation in April 2001 to inspect our project and has now become another major source of funds for the ASKMSC. At the end of 2001 an Italian donor organisation, the NGO “Sudtiroler Arzte fur die Dritte Welt” got aware of us through our website. They too sent a delegation to inspect our project in February 2002 and promised financial support in the future.

Another part of ASKMSC’s funds came from the membership fees of its members, but local donations were rather small in comparison to previous years. Nevertheless some local clubs as well as private donors contributed toys, blankets, clothes besides cash donations.

4. Outlook:

In the coming year we hope to start with the construction of our second home for street children as the first one is now almost fully occupied. It is also planned to build a playground for the children on the land acquired this year. The newly admitted children have to be sent to school next April.