

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2002-03

- 1. Introduction** Within this year the Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children (ASKMSC) has fully established itself with its first home for street children reaching full capacity after the admission of another 5 children. A total of 27 orphaned, abandoned or other children in need enjoy now food, shelter and education in our first home for street children.
- 2. Activities:**
- (i) General** – At the beginning of the past year we were once again trying to get more of our children admitted to formal schools. Eight of our children were already going to school and had just completed the first year. All did very well and were promoted to their respective successive classes. Besides them we succeeded to get another 10 children admitted to school in April 2002. Again we were able to get them into English medium schools. We now have a total of 18 school going children. Of those not admitted most were not yet with us at the beginning of the school year. A few were not ready for admission yet or were simply too young. All our children continued to get in-house teaching by our staff throughout the year to either help them with their homework and studies or get them prepared for next years admission test.
- Before classes commenced we went on a 4 days outing to Talshari at the sea beach. For all children it was the first time they saw the sea and they were all very excited about it. During the Puja holidays we went for another outing to Kurseong. The owner of Makaibari Tea Estate sponsored a one week stay for all of our children in his tea garden.
- In June 2002 the Directorate of Social Welfare inspected our home for street children and eventually granted renewal of our license to run this home as required under the West Bengal Women's and Children's Institutions (Licensing) Rules, 1958.
- The co-operation with other organisations working in the field of street children, such as CINI-Asha, OFFER and SANLAAP continued within the last 12 months and our children were even invited for the foundation day celebrations of CINI-Asha. The co-operation with the foreign NGOs, too, intensified last year and the German NGO "Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e.V." as well as the Italian NGO "Sudtiroler Ärzte für die Dritte Welt" sent delegations again.
- While the number of children was 22 at the beginning of the year the number increased to 27 with 5 admissions within the year. Of those one child was referred to us by CINI-Asha, one by OFFER,

one by Kanti Ganguly (MLA) and two were directly admitted by a parent.

The following 5 new children could be accommodated:

Prabir Adhikari, 6 years
Somnath Mistri, 6 years
Sourav Dey, 2 years
Subhasish Mandal, 7 years
Vicky Ray, 5 years

Once again the ASKMSC could not make any progress regarding the construction of the second home for street children this year and there seems to be still a lot of paper work ahead before we can actually submit a plan for sanctioning. But we were able to complete the boundary wall around our properties and do have a closed compound now with an entrance gate. It was also possible to clean and beautify one of our two vacant plots and our children use it as a playground now.

(ii) Problems faced by us – In contrast to the previous year we did not face any problem with children running away as most of our children are with us since quite some time now and can be considered stable. Instead we encountered a problem of a different nature. With the number of children increasing they became more unruly and undisciplined. They developed a destructive habit and would destroy toys rather than playing with them. Therefore it was only possible to hand out toys under the supervision of our staff and collect the toys again afterwards. Another problem was the sudden lack of interest of some of our children to go to school and hence a decline in marks. Proper counselling is required in the future to solve these problems.

A big problem in the last year was our youngest child Ravi Yadav who was only 4 months old and extremely sick and undernourished when he came to us. Not being prepared to raise a baby we had to hire a person exclusively looking after Ravi. Under this intensive care Ravi fortunately recovered and is now a healthy member of our “family”.

Another problem we faced when we tried to admit some of our children to schools with higher standards. They were simply rejected on the grounds of being from a home for street children rather than from an intact family. Therefore we were not able to admit any of our children to a different school.

Within this year complains by neighbours also increased. While some complains were about noise a lot of them were of petty nature and mainly intended to cause unnecessary harassment.

(iii) Education – In April 2002 our 8 children attending Apollos’ Academy, Santoshpur, were resuming their studies after having been promoted with excellent results to the following classes:

Preparatory Class: Biswajit Sikdar, Chattu Das, Qutubuddin Sheikh, Pintu Das, Pradip Das.

Class I: Ajar Sheikh, Sudhir Dhopi, Suraj Dhopi.

Besides that in the same month another 10 of our children set for admission test with Apollos' Academy and were admitted to the following classes:

Nursery I: Banti Sharma, Bubai Yadav, Shanu Sing.

Nursery II: Ashim Mondal, Vicky Sharma, Gour Halder, Khokan Halder, Suman Deb.

Preparatory Class: Khisore Halder, Raju Chakraborty.

As most of our children continued to progress well in school some started to lose interest in going to school and also tried to avoid in-house teaching. As a result of this marks in school started to get worse. Particularly Ajar Sheikh who had been first in his class in the previous year was not interested in his studies at all. It seemed to us that he saw no more challenge after having made it to the top. That is why we decided to get him and some other children admitted to schools with higher standards. Unfortunately all schools we approached refused to take in our children fearing protests by the parents and therefore an economic backlash. So we were forced to keep them in Apollos' Academy for the time being and try again later.

With more children going to school our second teacher also had to get involved in helping with homework and studies as we divided the children in two groups. Still both teachers were able to prepare those children who were not yet going to school for admission in the morning while the others were in school. Nevertheless some needed one to one teaching and special care to prepare them for admission in the coming year. This job was done by one of our foreign volunteers who especially looked after Pappu Sheikh who due to his age had to be admitted to a higher class. He therefore had to study a lot more to catch up and to succeed in this task than the other children. Another boy she looked after was Shibu Dey who is suffering from Attention Deficit Syndrome and can hardly be motivated to study at all.

(iv) Medical – This year, too, our doctor continued with his monthly check-ups to record the overall improvement of the state of health of our children as well as a gain in weight and height. It seems that all our children are developing well and there was no major health problem throughout the year. The vaccination program was carried on, too, and the new admissions were screened for HIV. In the month of June Bicky Sharma underwent eye surgery to correct a squint. The operation has been successful

and with the help of glasses he can see well now. There was an outbreak of chicken pox in the month of February. A visiting doctor from the Italian NGO “Sudtiroler Arzte fur die Dritte Welt” also did a check-up of the children in March.

(v) Sports and other Activities – With increasing studies physical exercise has become even more important this year to maintain a balance. Therefore we made sure that morning walk as well as football or cricket in the afternoon still remained part of the routine. We also organized a football tournament in November with 4 mixed teams of staff and children. Karate, too, is still a good source of physical exercise for our children and they once again won several trophies this year.

(vi) Leisure – This year we added two more activities for the free time of the children. A drawing teacher as well as a guitar teacher offered their services, besides the usual play with toys, board games and outdoor games such as cricket and football.

(vii) Birthday – It has become an annual tradition to celebrate the “birthday” of our children on 19 November of each year as the first ten children moved in on 19 November 2000. So this year, too, on the second reoccurrence of this day we had a big birthday party. It started in the morning with a football tournament. In the afternoon there was many different games and competitions. In the evening school friends joint in for cutting of the birthday cake and for dinner.

(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 again several excursions with our children made sure that they got some change from the daily routine. Besides another trip to “Aquatca” and some outings to the countryside for picnic we went for two major excursions. In April we went for 4 days to the sea beach near Digha and in November we went for a week to the Darjeeling hills. Both sea beach and hills were a first for all of our children and they were particularly stunned when they saw snow capped mountains for the first time in their lives.

(x) Volunteers – Local and foreign volunteers continued to be another pillar in the work of ASKMSC. They helped with the education of the children, their daily routine, etc. and also offered activities such as playing games, drawing, singing, dancing and so on, which is not only entertaining for the children, but also important to develop their creativity.

3. Finances:

With the ASKMSC now well established the financial situation of

the society was quite sound in the past year. The three NGOs “Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.” of Germany, “ASK Children’s Trust” of the UK and “Sudtiroler Ärzte für die Dritte Welt” of Italy remained the major financial pillars of the ASKMSC. The “Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.” continued to arrange personal sponsors for our children and sent regular contributions for maintenance and up-keep. The British and the Italian organisations, too, sent regularly contributions to run our project. Moreover the Italian NGO applied on behalf of the ASKMSC with their state government in the month of September to grant financial support towards the construction cost of our proposed second home for street children. The Italian state government in March awarded the application and a substantial amount was granted, which will already cover approx. 70% of the total construction cost of the building. Apart from the membership fees of the members we also received some local donations again in the last year. Besides that the owner of a tea estate sponsored one week of stay in his tea garden for all our kids. Another contribution came from a local dog breeder who donated one German Sheppard puppy to our children.

4. Outlook:

With the first home full beyond capacity it is now certainly important to begin with the construction of the second building. Unfortunately a lot of bureaucratic hurdles still remain to be solved in the coming year. Another important task will be to admit the not yet admitted children to school.