

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2003-04

- 1. Introduction** Within the last year the Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children (ASKMSC) could not admit anymore children, as the first home for street children had reached full capacity with currently 27 children and the construction of the second building once again not making any progress beyond the planning phase.
- 2. Activities:** **(i) General** – The first priority at the beginning of the past year was to get the remaining children admitted to school. With the admission of another 8 children to Apollos' Academy last April a total of 26 children were going to English medium school now. This means all children, but Ravi Yadav who is still too young to go to school attended classes from Montessori level up to class II. Due to lack of fluency in English and an increased workload the two in-house teachers were not in the position to teach all the subjects anymore. Another teacher with fluency in English was therefore employed to help with the workload. And with the recruitment of a child psychologist another new employee has joined the staff of ASKMSC.
- At the end of this year once again we tried to get our children admitted to schools with higher standards. And where we could not succeed in the previous year due to prejudice against our children by the different schools we had applied for we succeeded this year. 24 children could be admitted to various schools with excellent standards, while two remained with Apollos' Academy. Besides school and studies we also had a lot of activities again throughout the year, such as outings and excursions or sports and games. In April 2003 just before school started we went to Aquatica with all the children for a day of fun and enjoyment. Further outings and excursions within the year were a sponsored weekend trip to Digha in August, an afternoon in the Zoo in October, a day in Nicco Park at the beginning of March 2004 and 6 days in Puri at the sea beach at the end of the same month.
- In June 2003 the Directorate of Social Welfare once again sent somebody for inspection of our home for street children and renewal of our license to run this home as required under the West Bengal Women's and Children's Institutions (Licensing) Rules, 1958, was granted a month later.
- Since our first home for street children was full beyond capacity the co-operation with other organisations working in the field of street children was mainly opposite to the previous years. This

year we were referring children to other organisations when we could not take them in anymore and asked them to find a place for those children. But there were also other fields of co-operation and in the months of January we were invited for a one day workshop organized by CINI-Asha to share experience with other NGOs. The workshop and the exchange of thoughts with members of other NGOs was quite encouraging and it was decided to repeat this kind of workshop every 6 month.

Like in the year before our children were invited again for the foundation day celebrations of CINI-Asha and for the first time this year for the U16 football tournament organized by Don Bosco Liluha. We also managed to establish friendly contacts with a small project for street children similar to ours, the PBKOJP Boy's Home with 19 boys. We started to have football as well as cricket tournaments with them and some of our boys found new friends. We hope there will be scope for more common activities in the future.

As for the foreign NGOs which support us financially there has been some delegations visiting again. The treasurer of the German NGO "Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V." came for the second time to visit and inspect our project in the month of April 2003 and the president of the Italian NGO "Sudtiroler Ärzte für die Dritte Welt", also came for his second visit in the months of September 2003, this time together with his wife. He once again checked the general health of our children during his visit and documented the state of the teeth of the children by video. The Italian NGO then managed to organize a dental camp by sending a dentist and a team of assistants in February 2004. Besides that a lot of independent visitors who had heard about our project came throughout the year from the locality as well as from abroad. A French football coach offered to hold a football camp and came for three weeks at the end of December and first week of January to coach our children.

The ASKMSC also got another four-legged member in the last year. Besides the German Shepard donated by a dog breeder in the previous year and named Donald by the children there is now also a cat. She was rescued from the street as a young kitten last October and is called Josephine by our children.

This year the ASKMSC could only make small progress towards the construction of the second home for street children. An architect was hired for planning and plan sanctioning and most of the papers required for the submission of the plan with the authorities could be obtained, but the hope to complete the construction of the second home within the last year again did not materialize. It is expected now that work will commence soon and should be completed within the coming financial year.

(ii) Problems faced by us – One of our first priorities this year

was to get the destructive energy of our children under control and where possible to divert it into something more constructive. In the previous year we had already started to allow them to play only under the supervision of our staff, because otherwise they would just destroy all the toys given to them. But whenever there were some gaps between classes or some periods were some or all of the children were temporarily not occupied with something they started to get completely out of control and would commit all kinds of nuisance, fight with each other or destroy anything in their way. In order to tackle this problem we broke down the group size according to their school classes and worked out a strict daily routine for each group separately. The aim was not to have any more gaps, but either studies or activities, such as indoor or outdoor games, handicrafts, drawing, etc. or duties such as toilet cleaning, etc. and that too all under the constant supervision of our staff. There were supposed to be no more idle children, loitering, etc. Unfortunately it took some time to get the new system implemented as the staff tended to be careless at times and would not always follow the new routine, but rather slept behind closed doors or did other things instead. We also noticed that it was difficult to make our children acquainted with certain standards of hygiene and cleanliness amongst other things, when our staff themselves did not follow these standards. We therefore introduced a "behaviour class" once a week for staff and children together. We also approached our drawing teacher to write small, but funny theatre plays of educational value and perform them together with the children.

All these measures once implemented helped a lot to improve the situation, but there were still children who would not listen to our staff and would try to sabotage everything, disturb when ever they could and carried on with their destructive behaviour. It was then when we decided to employ a child psychologist to council our children, particularly those with behaviour disorders. This was also considered to be necessary, because some of the children continued to be unmotivated to go to school or to study. Mrs. Sangita Bhattacharya joined in January and comes twice a week for 4 hours each to counsel the children as well as teaching our staff how to better deal with the children. It is hoped that this will have a positive effect on the behaviour of our children in the future.

Our youngest child Ravi Yadav developed very well during the last year and we eventually could integrate him into the regular life of our home together with the other boys. But being the youngest of the lot he got spoiled as everybody would carry him around and would pass over food or sweets to him. He is therefore overweight now and has a sometimes very demanding attitude. Attempts to make the staff understand and not to constantly give in to his demands have been futile so far.

A problem of a different kind was our failed attempt to make progress towards our proposed second home for street children. As there were a lot of complains by our neighbours in the previous year we decided to drop the idea to build the second home on one of our two vacant plots adjacent to the existing building and to utilize the second for a playground. Instead we decided to get the two vacant plots and the plot with the building amalgamated to build a house joined with the existing building. It was planned to build all along the boundary and leave an inner courtyard surrounded by the building, which could be used as the playground for the children. This way the neighbours would not get disturbed by noise of the playing children. Unfortunately the required paperwork for the amalgamation of three plots was so immense that it would have taken too much time for it to be completed. We eventually had to drop the idea as we had a deadline to meet for the utilisation of funds granted by Italy. We therefore went for the amalgamation of the two vacant plots only as this could be done faster. Still it remained a very time consuming task. In the month of December we appointed an architect to get started with the planning of the building, which was now supposed to be a U-shaped building not joined with the existing building, but still with a quite protected playground in-between. We hoped that this way the plan would be ready for submission with KMC for sanctioning as soon as the amalgamation was through. Unfortunately by the end of this accounting year there was still little progress as the amalgamation was held up in the KMC. It is now hoped that things will come to a successful end at the beginning of the coming accounting year.

(iii) Education – In April 2003 our 18 children already attending Apollos' Academy, Santoshpur, were resuming with their studies after having been promoted, some of them with excellent results, to the following classes:

Class II: Ajgar Sheikh, Sudhir Dhopi, Suraj Dhopi.

Class I: Biswajit Sikdar, Chattu Shau, Qutubuddin Sheikh, Pintu Das, Pradip Das, Kishore Halder, Raju Chakraborty.

Preparatory Class: Ashim Mondal, Vicky Sharma, Gour Halder, Khokan Halder, Suman Deb.

Nursery II: Banti Sharma, Sanu Sing.

Bubai Yadav was also promoted to Nursery II, but considering his low age and his poor results we had decided to send him once again to Nursery I.

Besides that in the same month another 8 of our children set for admission test with Apollo's Academy and were admitted to the following classes:

Class II: Pappu Sheikh.

Class I: Jagannath Das.

Preparatory Class: Subhasish Mondal, Somnath Mistri.

Nursery II: Prabir Adhikari, Vicky Ray

Nursery I: Shibu Dey.

Montessori: Sourav Dey.

Only the youngest "family" member Ravi Yadav could not be admitted to school yet, as his age is still too low.

With 26 children going to school our two in-house teachers could not handle the workload anymore. Moreover their knowledge and command of the English language was limited. We therefore employed another teacher with fluency in English. Mrs. Champa Kundu joined our staff in the month of September. Since the children are in school in the morning she only comes in the afternoon and stays for 7 hours. During this time she helps with homework and studies of the two highest classes and teaches all subjects except Bengali. Despite having three tutors now looking after the educational needs of our children there continued to be children who needed special attention and one to one teaching. They were once again looked after by foreign volunteers.

Under all this special care and guidance our newly admitted children managed to integrate well into their respective classes and this year, too, most of our children were amongst the best in their school. We therefore tried once again to get our children admitted to English medium schools with higher standards. Our children were sitting for admission tests in several good schools and unlike the previous year this time they were allowed to join the following schools:

Ram Mohan Mission School: Suraj Dhopi.

Nava Nalanda: Ajar Sheikh, Qutubuddin Sheikh, Sudhir Dhopi, Sourav Dey, Khokan Halder, Ashim Mondal.

A. K. Ghosh Memorial School: Sanu Singh, Biswajit Sikdar, Chattu Shau, Pintu Das, Pradip Das, Kishore Halder, Raju Chakraborty, Vicky Sharma, Gour Halder, Suman Deb, Banti Sharma, Pappu Sheikh, Jagannath Das, Subhasish Mondal,

Somnath Mistri, Prabir Adhikari, Vicky Ray

We decided to keep Shibu Dey and Bubai Yadav in Apollos' Academy as both of them are rather weak students and seemed to be better off there. We have also decided to admit Ravi Yadav in the Kindergarten section of Apollos' Academy in the coming year.

(iv) Medical – This year past by without any major medical problems. With some of the children now already with us since more than 3 years the general state of their health seems to have improved a lot. Due to a regular food intake and safe drinking water they develop in height and weight in accordance with their age and the routine monthly check-ups by our doctor as well as the immunization program help to maintain this good overall state of health. In spite of the excellent physical condition of our children two health related problems remained. One being the poor oral health some of our children had inherited from their life as street children. The implementation of regular tooth brushing had somewhat stopped further decay, but some teeth urgently needed repair. We therefore approached Dr. Toni Pizzocco from the Italian NGO “Sudtiroler Arzte fur die Dritte Welt” to send a dentist from Italy. While being a few days in Kolkata last September Dr. Pizzocco not only did another medical check-up of our children, but also took note of the state of their teeth. He then managed to convince the Italian dentist Dr. Tamiazzo to organize a dental camp for our children. In February Dr. Tamiazzo came to India with a team to assist him. During the dental camp held in our home for street children he and his team inspected all the children's teeth and repaired where ever required.

While the first health related problem was of physical nature the second refers to concerns about the mental wellbeing of our children. We therefore employed a child psychologist who joined in the month of January and is now regularly counselling the children.

(v) Sports and related Activities – Physical activities continued to play an important role not only to balance the pressure put on the children by their studies, but also to help us with our attempts to keep all the children occupied throughout the day to avoid loitering and to counter social stress. Besides the daily morning walk football has become a favourite time pass. Football games on every Saturday morning with the staff joining in have become a regular event and our children have participated in several football tournaments throughout the year. They were invited for the U16 football tournament organized by Don Bosco where they ended third despite being by far the youngest team participating. They also played some friendly games with the children of another home for street children. In the months of December a French

football coach gave them football lessons for 3 weeks and he was so pleased with them that he offered to organize another football camp in the month of July 2004. He also sponsored some footballs and a ball-pump.

Being more and more concerned about the lack of emphasis on the defensive philosophy of Karate by the Karate instructor and considering the already quite destructive and sometimes aggressive behaviour of some of our children we decided to terminate Karate this year and replaced it by the more peaceful and introspective Yoga. A Yoga teacher comes twice a week now to instruct our children as well as our staff in Yoga.

Besides that there have been other activities, such as badminton, athletics and the usual cricket.

(vi) Leisure – Keeping with our goal to develop the creativity of our children and to educate them at the same time, we added theatre to our list of activities. We approached the drawing teacher who already comes one afternoon a week for drawing lessons to write some small plays that would not only be fun for the children to perform, but also educate them about certain topics, such as cleanliness, hygiene, politeness, environmental issues, etc. He now comes for a second afternoon every week to bring his little plays alive using percussion instruments and engaging the children as musicians and actors. He sometimes also does some puppet shows with them.

Besides that there are still a lot of other activities throughout the week, such as drawing, handicrafts, guitar lessons, indoor games and sports.

(vii) Birthday – On 19 November 2003 we held our annual birthday celebration. After the traditional football tournament in the morning there were once again a lot of games in the afternoon with the “treasure hunt” being once again the absolute favourite. In the evening our children performed some songs and theatre plays to entertain their many guests who had come for birthday cake and dinner. There was also a prize distribution ceremony for the winning teams of the football tournament and the afternoon games.

(viii) Meals – We continue to supply the children regularly with breakfast after morning walk, lunch and dinner, but the daily milk and biscuit break at 5 o’clock was modified. Different kinds of fruits are now served daily during this break and no more milk is given. Instead the milk is served for breakfast.

(ix) Excursions – We could manage two major trips to the sea beach this year for a change from the daily routine. In the first week of August we went to Digha for some days. This was a

sponsored trip by a visiting NRI and we all went by car. Another excursion to the sea beach we could organise in the months of March. This time we went by train with all the children to Puri and spent some days in the Youth Hostel. Besides that some smaller outings could also be organised again. A trip to “Aquatika” was possible again last April when a visitor from the German NGO “Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.” sponsored the outing. In October the children went to the Zoo and in December they had their annual picnic again in the countryside.

(x) Volunteers – This year, too, we had a few foreign and local volunteers who helped us with the daily workload, particularly with the one-to-one teaching of Shibu, Bubai and Sourav. They also took charge of the correspondence of the children with their sponsors abroad and helped to look after the children during their leisure hours apart from doing handicrafts, painting, singing and other creative activities with the children.

3. Finances:

In the past financial year the ASKMSC intensified contacts with the Italian NGO “Sudtiroler Ärzte für die Dritte Welt”, which did not only send doctors, dentists and medicines, but has also become one of the major financial supporters for the project. They have already transferred part of the money granted by their local state government for the construction of our second building and they will continue to support us in the future. The main part of the costs for the next building will be covered by them. The remaining part has been granted by the other big financial supporter of the society the German NGO “Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.”. With financial problems being the main reason for a delay in the construction of our first home for street children we are all set now to avoid such problems in the future. Once the plan is sanctioned by the KMC and construction can commence there should be no financial bottlenecks or hold-ups during the construction of the second building.

Besides that the running costs as well as maintenance and up-keep of the existing home were once again covered by the German NGO with the Italian organization contributing to this, for instance by financing in part the costs for school education of the children.

Except for the annual membership fees local contributions were quite low in the last year, but since the financial situation of the society is at the moment not as bad as in the past, no special efforts were made to improve the situation in this regard.

All in all the financial outlook for the coming year seems to be quite good and there should be no major monetary problems to run the project in the coming financial year.

4. Outlook:

It has been resolved since several years now to get started with the construction of our second home for street children, but

unfortunately a lot of bureaucratic hurdles apart from other problems continued to stop us from doing so. With practically all bureaucratic obstacles removed by now and the planning for the next building already on its way it should be no longer wishful thinking to succeed with this task in the coming year. In fact construction should be completed within the next 12 months and the first children should be able to move in by the end of the coming financial year.