

**Annual Report on the work of the**  
**Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children**  
**for the year 2006-07**

**1. Introduction**        The past year did not always fulfil our expectations and in many ways it was a somewhat stagnant year for the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) with not too much progress in some fields and a heap of problems in others. This is also reflected in the number of new admissions, as only two children could be admitted over the year.

**2. Activities:**        **(i) General** – As in every year the first priority at the beginning of this past accounting year was once again the admission of our children to school. For some of our children we were looking for a new school, while others carried on in their old ones. In total we had 35 children attending five different schools in Kolkata in this past year, while five of our children attended two separate boarding schools in Kurseong.

While in the previous accounting year twelve street children were able to find a home for the first time in their lives in our project, only two new boys could be admitted in the past accounting year. On 11.05.06 the 8 year old Biswanath Maity and his 6 year old brother Somnath Maity were referred to us by OFFER. They both could be sent to school immediately. This means the total number of children in our project reached now 40. Unfortunately no more children could be admitted throughout the year, because the Directorate of Social Welfare kept the renewal of our licence to run a home for street children pending after their usual inspection at the beginning of the accounting year. This was due to a sudden objection by the Directorate of Social Welfare against foreign volunteers in our project. We therefore saw ourselves forced not to take in any new admissions until this problem is solved and our licence is renewed.

The biggest event in the medical sphere in the past year was the surgical correction of little Sourav Dey's Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD). We had finally decided not to wait any longer with the surgery and so the operation was done in the months of December'06. Fortunately it went without any complications and turned out to be a full success. A rather sad incident in the same field was the discovery that Dr. Das had been prescribing unnecessary high quantities of drugs ever since he had joined our society, not caring a bit whether he was harming our children this way or even putting their lives at risk. It is obvious that he did this for personal gains and he was sacked immediately after the fraud was discovered.

Another rather sad development in the past accounting year was the lack of co-operation in our locality regarding a playground for our children. This had a negative effect on their football training sessions, but at least the decision of the previous year to divide our children in two teams, an 'A'-team and a 'B'-team with two different coaches proved beneficial for their football practice.

Co-operation with other NGOs continued in the past accounting year. Particularly the relationship with the project PBKOJP Boy's Home has become a very close one. The boys of that project and ours had become friends and often visited each other, organized sports and games competitions and even held their annual picnic together.

Besides many day outings there were two major excursions again in the past year. The first one to the sea beach in Puri in April'06 and the second to the hills in October'06 where we all once again were guests of Rajah Banerjee who is the owner of Makaibari Tea Estate.

In December'06 we organised a public cultural program in the hall of Kala Mandir where our children performed theatre plays, dance and poetry recitations. While some of our children already had some experience to perform on the big stage it was for most of them the first opportunity to do so and they all enjoyed it very much.

Like in the years before many foreign delegations came again to visit our project, but this time we were particularly honoured since we could welcome almost the entire governing body of our sister charity and main sponsor the German organisation "Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.". Dr. Marco Frank and his wife already came in the month of November'06, while Dr. Vera Hummel, Jurgen Kohler, Bernhard Pfister and Carmen Patrascu visited us in December'06/January'07. Further to this we had the pleasure to meet with Dr. Meyer-Hamme of the German NGO "H.E.L.G.O. e.V." who even visited our project twice in October'06 and again in March'07.

**(ii) Problems faced by us** – The major problem faced by us in the passed accounting year was the sudden objection of the Directorate of Social Welfare (DSW) against foreign volunteers in our project. While in all the previous years the DSW was least concerned about the presence of foreign volunteers, this suddenly became a big issue in the passed year. Particularly the presence of our founder, financier and fund raiser Mr. Muller suddenly seemed to irritate the DSW. For this reason the DSW was holding back the renewal of our license to run a home for street children, even though our project would not exist in the first place without Mr. Muller. As a consequence we were forced to stop new admissions of children for the time being, as the DSW threatened to close our institution and distribute our children to government run homes. Further to this we also did not see any other way than stopping the practice of volunteering completely until matters are settled with

the DSW. It is hoped that the DSW will change its harsh stand on foreign volunteers again in the future, as it would help us to run our project smoothly.

Another problem was the lack of co-operation in our locality regarding a playground for our children. Where ever we tried to use a local playground for football practice the people would eventually stop us. This is a huge setback for our football project and needs to be addressed in the future.

Unmotivated staff and behaviour problems amongst the older children due to puberty continued to be a problem in this year. Some of the younger children like Pintu Shau or Manoj Biswas, even though very good in school, attracted unwanted attention by fighting with their classmates or stealing school Tiffin from them. This caused constant quarrels with the parents of those classmates and in one incident Pintu attacked a boy with a screw and injured him under his eye. Fearing punishment he refused to go back to school and even run away for two days. We stopped sending these boys to school for some time, which helped to cool sediments. Further to this constant counselling of these boys in co-operation with the school teachers was required. Fortunately the teachers were very supportive and helpful in these cases.

Last but not least it should be mentioned here that in the past year our society had to struggle with some corrupt enemies within, who not only cheated money from the society, but even tried to hijack the entire project. When stopped and removed just about in time to save the project these criminal elements started a crusade against the society in order to take revenge and to prove their powers. It is believed that some of our problems are directly connected to the campaign against our society by these criminals.

**(iii) Education** – This past year we had 40 children in seven different schools of which two schools were boarding schools in Kurseong. Our two new children the brothers Biswanath and Somnath Maity could immediately be admitted to Apollos' Academy a school which had always been cooperative about admission of our children in the past. So by the end of the financial year our children were attending the following schools and classes:

Nava Nalanda School:

Class V: Sudhir Dhopi, Suraj Dhopi.

Class IV: Qutubuddin Sheikh.

Class III: Ashim Mondal, Khokan Halder.

Nursery I: Biswajit Sarder.

A. K. Ghosh Memorial School:

Class V: Ajgar Sheikh.

Class IV: Kishore Halder, Chattu Shau, Raju Chakraborty, Pintu

Das.

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

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

Class I: Raja Ratha.

KG II: Raquib Purkait, Bubai Yadav, Manoj Biswas.

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

Apollos' Academy:

Nursery II: Biswanath Maity, Somnath Maity.

Young Horizon School:

KG II: Chandan Das, Tapos Ghosh, Shuvendu Halder.

KG I: Ravi Yadav.

Manovikas Kendra:

SU I: Shibu Dey.

Himali Boarding School, Kurseong:

Class IV: Subhasish Mondal.

Class II: Vicky Roy.

Nursery II: Sourav Dey.

Sunshine School, Kurseong:

Class I: Abul Sheikh.

KG II: Babu Ghosh.

Jagannath Das, Biswajit Sikdar and Pradip Das all failed class three in the previous year and therefore had to repeat the class this year. But despite repeating it they still had difficulties to pass. And even though this time they all got promoted the results should have been much better for doing the class a second time. A lot of extra care and attention for these boys is required in the coming school year or otherwise they will also fail class IV. And while these three boys managed to pass, though with difficulties, things proved to be a bit too tough for Ajar Sheikh this year. He did not get the desired promotion and has to repeat class V.

Despite these setbacks most of our children continue to do well in school and many of them are still ranked amongst the very best. Especially our Kurseong boys are doing very well, with Subhasish Mondal, and Sourav Dey of Himali Boarding School and Babu Ghosh of Sunshine School being ranked first in their respective classes. Though not a topper Abul Sheikh is also doing fine in Sunshine School, but Vicky Roy continued with his annual struggle for promotion.

As all of our admissions of the previous year had integrated well into school we now started to shift them from Apollos' Academy to other schools for higher standards. For four of them Chandan Das, Tabos Ghosh, Shuvendu Halder and Ravi Yadav we found a new school of good standard near by. They are now studying in Young Horizon School. Little Biswajit could be admitted to Nava Nalanda school and all other boys are now students of A. K. Ghosh Memorial School.

Shibu Dey continued to blossom in Manovikas Kendra. This school really takes care about his special needs as a slow learner. He is still very motivated to go to school and is now able to read and write in English as well as Bengali and also knows basic maths.

In general one can observe that the educational efforts of the past years are slowly showing results. Since speaking in English for example has been more and more encouraged within the home English has become a second language now side by side with Bengali. Many children have started to express themselves in English or reply in English. This also has a very positive effect on our little once. While the older children had to struggle hard to pick up English, even though they came to us at a young age, the new English speaking environment allows our currently youngest boys to grow up almost bilingual and they learn English with ease.

**(iv) Medical** – Number one medical priority of the year was to finally determine whether a surgical correction of little Sourav Dey's Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD) was required or whether the problem had vanished by its own. It is a known fact that in some children with VSD the defect will close on its own as the child grows. In the previous year the heart surgeon had therefore advised us to wait another year with the surgery since there was no evidence that pulmonary hypertension had developed. He thought there would be little risk of infective Endocarditis, an infection of the inner surface of the heart caused by bacteria in the bloodstream, and therefore according to his opinion no danger to wait another year, as there was still a slight chance that the problem would be solved on its own. After discussing the case with Dr. Pizzocco president of the Italian NGO "Sudtiroler Arzte fur die Dritte Welt" and his team of doctors during their visit in the month of February'06 they came to the same conclusion and we therefore had decided to wait until Sourav's next winter school holiday end of November'06. So at the end of that month we went with Sourav to nearby Rabindranath Tagore International Institute of Cardiac Sciences, accompanied by Dr. Marco Frank treasurer of the German organisation "Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens Strassenkinder e. V." who happened to be in Kolkata for a visit to our society. The necessary examinations indicated that the defect had still not closed on its own. Fortunately at that time there was the opportunity of a workshop scheduled for the coming week. A visiting heart surgeon from USA was to demonstrate the use of

devices to cover VSDs by performing cardiac catheterization. This is a non-invasive surgical technique and is used instead of open heart surgery. With an offer to demonstrate this technique on little Sourav and the strong recommendation by Dr. Frank to go for it the decision was quite clear. After several years of waiting we decided to eventually go for surgery and this was really a great opportunity! After only three days in the hospital Sourav could be discharged again with little or no evidence of any surgery. The entire procedure had been a full success.

During his visit Dr. Frank also went through the health records of our children and the results of the monthly check-ups by Dr. Mandal and Dr. Das. The former had been working for us since the beginning of our project while the later had been appointed newly last year to look after all our new admissions. Dr. Frank noted normal gain in weight and height and a generally good state of health of our children, but pointed out that according to his opinion the children under the care of Dr. Das had been prescribed unnecessary high quantities of drugs in the past. He was particularly amazed by the fact that Dr. Das during his latest visit had prescribed each and every child a different and expensive antibiotic, even though Dr. Das had diagnosed all children in his care with the same problem, an ordinary cough. Dr. Frank advised us not to purchase the expensive medicine prescribed, but instead told us to utilize our nebuliser for regular inhaling sessions of those children affected by the cough. Following Dr. Frank's advice we indeed saw a speedy recovery of all those children who had suffered from this problem. After this incidence we decided to part with Dr. Das. Instead Dr. Mondal, previously reluctant to do the monthly check-up for so many children at the same time, agreed to take care of all our children.

Besides Sourav's VSD there were no serious health problems during this year, except a noted increase in fractures and bruises in comparison to previous years, some of them due to sports others because of failed attempts to copy the superheroes of movies and TV series. In general the overall state of health of our children is good and they all develop well and in accordance to their age groups.

**(v) Sports and related Activities** – As far as our prime sport football is concerned the decision of the previous year to divide our children in two teams an 'A'-team and a 'B'-team with two different coaches was certainly a success. With the number of children increasing one coach could not train all our children at the same time and since the age gap between the older boys who have been with us since many years and the newly admitted younger boys is also increasing it was the best decision to separate old boys and young boys in two different teams. This also gave the older boys with weaker skills in football the chance to practice with the younger boys. Unfortunately this year too like in the year before there were a lot of setbacks for our football academy project as our

second attempt to get affiliated in the Nursery Division of IFA had also been rejected by the IFA for no apparent reason. Moreover our French youth coach Mr. Michel Sauvestre had to cancel his planned annual visit to our society due to personal reasons, but in view of the sudden objections of the Directorate of Social Welfare against foreign volunteers this could have been a blessing in disguise, as his stay in our project could have raised further eyebrows with the Directorate. Still his absence was felt very badly and again the planned football camp with Mr. Sauvestre in Kalikata/Rashpur near Amta in co-operation with the NGO Agragati could not take place. It is hoped that the Directorate will drop its objections against foreign volunteers again in the future, as FIFA trained and licensed youth coaches like Mr. Sauvestre do not excised in India and it would be very sad if we had to reject the offer of Mr. Sauvestre to coach our boys free of charge to help Indian football to improve its standard. Further to this we are currently facing a playground problem. With no playground of our own we are strongly dependant on the utilization of a playground in the locality for our football training, but due to lack of co-operation in our neighbourhood this seems to get more and more difficult in the future. In this regard it comes as a blessing that we have at least our little courtyard, which has been used intensively for small football training sessions as well as badminton, volleyball, yoga and gymnastics. There has also been some volleyball matches with the boys of PBKOJP Boy's Home in our courtyard as well as on their volleyball ground.

**(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music** – In terms of arts & music main focus this year was set on theatre and acting and the highlight of the year was a public cultural show in the hall of Kala Mandir organised by ASKMSC on 31<sup>st</sup> December'06 where our children performed jointly with other children. In addition to our own in-house theatre group a drama group of Jadavpur University offered to organize a weekly theatre therapy course with our children, which took place every Saturday evening in our project. Further to this they invited two of our most talented children, Pradip Das and Suraj Dhopi, to join their rehearsals at JU. In the month of June'06 that group eventually performed their interpretation of a work by Rabindranath Thakur in Gyan Mancha and our two boys played a roll in their piece. Besides theatre and acting the Tabla and dance lessons went on every week and there was scope for some of our boys to display their progress and skills during the 19<sup>th</sup> November birthday celebration and the cultural show in December.

In the field of entertainment during leisure hours the absolute event was the Football World Cup Final in Germany. Already one month before the event the German Cultural Institute Max Muller Bhavan organized a free film festival in Nandan with daily movies all around the theme of football. Almost daily a group or two of our boys went to see a movie and the absolute favourite turned out to be the African movie "The Golden Ball" about a poor boy from

the countryside who eventually makes it big in football and becomes a superstar. All our kids were fascinated by this movie, which obviously reflected one of their own dreams. And then the World Cup started! One month our boys followed all the news, results and gossip about the event and tried to follow as many matches as possible on TV. Our “Games Room” turned into a football stadium and every goal was welcomed by a fanatic cheer. To balance this an hour of yoga trice a week was certainly a good thing even so the yoga lessons have still not found a favourite place in the hearts of our children. They preferred to kick the ball themselves during their free time and their weekly training sessions or indulged in other sports activities.

Last but not least there were always the much-loved weekly cooking courses and drawing lessons as possible activities during leisure hours and in the winter Mrs. Ghosh once more held her free handicraft and art workshop.

**(vii) Birthday** – The highlight of every year is the annual birthday party on 19<sup>th</sup> of November. This day commemorates the day when the first ten children moved into our project in the year 2000. This year too it was a big event all the children were looking forward to. There was the usual football tournament in the morning and ‘treasure hunt’, games and quiz contest in the afternoon. The entertainment program for the guests in the evening was even more comprehensive than in previous years. This time the children had prepared two different theatre plays, one in Bengali and one in English. Besides that there was recitations of poems, songs, dance and music all rounded up by an excellent dinner. The growing popularity of the event was also reflected in the higher number of guests who crowded the courtyard of our project, which had once again turned into an illuminated theatre hall.

**(viii) Meals** – We serve our children a fish meal 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 there is always a choice of vegetable and dal curries with rice as well as soybean flakes for further protein intake. Both lunch and dinner are supplemented by salad. We continue to supply the children with milk and cereals in the morning and fruits for the daily snack break at 5 o’clock in the afternoon. While mealtimes for breakfast and lunch are subject to the different school timetables of the children dinner at 8 pm is the occasion for everybody to meet.

**(ix) Excursions** – After two years of a limited excursion program there was quite a few outings again in this year. In April and May’06 the children went to the sea beach once more. This annual journey to Puri has become a regular event by now, but this time the children went in several shifts together with their group attendants.

After a gap of one year we were also able to spend a week in Makaibari Tea Estate, Kurseong again. The owner of the estate had invited all the children once more for the Kali Puja school holidays and arranged for accommodation, food and entertainment as well as a fantastic firework on Puja day. Since the estate is near Kurseong even our five children who stay in boarding schools in Kurseong could join in. Everybody enjoyed and it was hard for the children to return back to school after the holidays.

Our annual picnic took place again in December'06 and this time we had decided to have a joint picnic with the children of PBKOJP Boy's Home. So almost 80 children and staff had a day of fun and frolic in the countryside.

Further to this there were many one day excursions and outings of the different groups. On national holidays and weekends they went together with their respective group attendant to visit museums, parks, cinema halls, etc.

**(x) Volunteers** – As every year this year too we had some volunteers local and foreign, but due to the sudden objections raised by the Directorate of Social Welfare against foreign volunteers we stopped the practice of volunteers completely. This is a big lose for the society as some of our foreign volunteers were giving valuable contributions free of charge to our project for many years. But until and unless the Directorate of Social Welfare does not withdraw their objections against foreign volunteers we see no other way than rejecting any offer for voluntary help in the future.

### **3. Finances:**

In this past financial year the total costs for running our project came down considerably. This is mainly due to the successful removal of some corrupt elements within our society, but also partly a result of the fact that funds were more or less only needed for the routine day-to-day expenditure, as there were only a few additions to the buildings and a little repair work here and there. Moreover the number of children increased only by two. All this could be financed again with the help of our regular contributors. The biggest amongst them this year was the German organisation "Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens Strassenkinder e. V." which contributed more than 60% of the annual foreign financial assistance to the society and the other one being once more the Italian organisation "Sudtiroler Arzte fur die Dritte Welt Onlus". Nevertheless there is always a need for additional funds and in this year the ASKMSC succeeded to attract for the first time the financial support of another organisation, the German NGO "H.E.L.G.O. e.V.". This consolidates the financial situation of the society further and assures a smooth and stable running and maintenance of our project in the future.

Like in the previous years most local donations again were given to us by NRIs passing through. Besides that some people from the locality sponsored a meal for all the children again or gave some

clothes or cash. The owner of the Makaibari Tea Estate once again sponsored one week of stay in his tea garden for all our kids and like every year a small but regular contribution came from the annual membership fees of the members.

**4. Outlook:**

As we could not achieve full capacity in this past year it certainly remains a goal for the coming year. It should therefore be one of our major priorities now to fill in the last vacancies of our project in the financial year ahead of us. This of course depends on the co-operation and willingness of the Directorate of Social Welfare.

Another task for the coming year will be the revival of our football project. For this purpose an adequate football field for proper training sessions and frequent football matches must be found.