

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2009-10

1. Introduction

The past year saw no increase in the number of children. Also no progress could be made regarding our village project in the twelfth year since the formation of the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC). But apart from that the day-to-day work took its normal course and the long running co-operation with our German partner *Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e.V.* went on smooth.

2. Activities:

(i) General – At the beginning of the financial year 2009-2010 the ASKMSC had 41 children aged 7 to 15 years. There were no new admissions throughout the year, mainly because the extension of license from the Directorate of Social Welfare is still pending. On the other hand no child ran away during the year and there was hence no change in numbers of inmates.

The only child not yet admitted to a formal school, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was admitted to school this year and therefore all our 41 boys went to formal schools at the beginning of the financial year. One boy, [REDACTED], was admitted back to a Kolkata school from Kurseong, after he could not adjust to the boarding school situation there. Therefore we had only four students in boarding schools in Kurseong, Darjeeling District this year. As the general downtrend of the marks of our children had continued throughout the school year, we decided to get them admitted to schools with smaller classes, which are in the vicinity of our home. Another major reason for this decision was the inability of our staff to organise amongst themselves the daily drop and pick-up from school. With the change of the academic year by the government this already had to be done at the end of our financial year, which meant increase in cost in the last quarter for admission fees normally paid in the first quarter of the next financial year.

Sport and football in particular remained an integral part of our extracurricular activities and our own football club FC Kolkata formed in the previous year was divided in three teams according to age. We now have a U16, U14 and U12 team, each one with 12 to 15 players. Further to this we were lucky to get a new foreign volunteer coach in our neighbourhood. Mr. Marbyn Molina from Honduras has offered to coach our children free of charge.

Besides sports there were the usual activities, such as drawing lessons, Yoga, Tabla course, etc., but some of the activities had to

be scraped for lack of interest or enthusiasm by our teaching staff and children or shortage of time due to studies.

The overall health of our children was good throughout the year, but there was a tumour in [REDACTED]'s ear, which was successfully removed. Besides that some fractures and minor injuries, due to sports activities could be seen again.

The ASKMSC continued to work together with other NGOs such as CINI-Asha, PBKOJP Boy's Home, etc. and there was also a string of visitors again, amongst them regulars like Dr. Meyer-Hamme from "H.E.L.G.O. e.V.", but also for the first time the Vice-President of our sister charity and main sponsor the German organisation "Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V."

The ASKMSC also got two new four-legged members in the last year. Besides a cat named Josephine II we a got a new dog again called Annie by the children.

In memory of the first ten street children that moved in on 19th November 2000 we celebrated the annual birthday party on the return of that day in November 2009. Unfortunately even some uninvited guests entered our premises and left with packed food, so that at the end of the day there was no food left for our children. In addition to our two major excursions of every year, Puri in summer and Kurseong during the Puja vacations, we organized a three days boat trip to the Sundarbans in February.

(ii) Problems faced by us – The problems with adolescence and poor results in school continued throughout the year. Also an overall increase of violent behaviour of our children could be observed. This was probably due to brutal and violent movies our children were watching with no guidance by our staff who did not get actively involved in the selection of movies anymore, nor did they care what kind of movies the children were watching. This meant that even the youngest of our children were exposed to graphic violence and gory scenes.

Also one of the main problems of this year was our staff not following anymore the weekly routine. A complete breakdown of the discipline in the house was the result. Also long and frequent absenteeism of the staff aggravated the problem. The group system broke down completely and children's absence from their respective groups was no more felt by the educator in charge, which led to children running around aimlessly on the compound with increased destruction of the property being one of the undesired results.

Once again no inspector from the Directorate of Social Welfare came this year for the routine annual inspection of our home for former street children and therefore our application for extension of license applied for in March 2009 is still pending even after the end of the financial year 2009-2010. As every year we submitted

another application for extension in March 2010 and hope the problem will be solved within the next financial year. In the meantime we were forced to stop admissions of new cases until the license issue is resolved.

(iii) Education – With the admission of Shambhu Malakar to Class I of Apollos’ Academy at the beginning of the past financial year we had all of our 41 children attending mainstream schools throughout the year. They were attending the following classes of five different schools in Kolkata and two boarding schools in Kurseong:

Nava Nalanda School:

[REDACTED]

A. K. Ghosh Memorial School:

[REDACTED]

Apollos’ Academy:

[REDACTED]

Young Horizon School:

[REDACTED]

Manovikas Kendra:

[REDACTED]

Himali Boarding School, Kurseong:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Sunshine School, Kurseong:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Unfortunately the general downtrend of the results of our children in school of the last years continued and several of our children failed to get promoted at the end of the year or passed under consideration. Further to this it became more and more impossible to organise and manage the transfers of all the children to school and back. Different classes even in the same school had different timings and with a total of seven different schools the problems became unmanageable. Members of our staff started to argue who will pick up whom and cases of children not picked up at all from school and schools phoning in to complain about it became frequent.

It became clear at the end of the academic year that we had to do something about this. Nava Nalanda School and A. K. Ghosh Memorial School were far away from our home for former street children in Sandoshpur and we understood that with classes of more than 60 students in these schools there cannot be any individual care for weaker students by the class teachers. Moreover we realized that their medium of teaching was not really English, even though they were English Medium Schools and as a result the English of our children remained rudimentary at best, as they were not forced to speak in English. Therefore they could not follow their own textbooks when they tried to study at home, as they are all written in English. We therefore decided to move our children to schools with a better student teacher ratio in the vicinity of our home and gave the children the option to sit for admission test for Young Horizon School, a school of good standing or to go back to Apolos' Academy where they had studied before. Both schools have the advantage to be within walking distance of ASKMSC and both schools have a good student teacher ratio. Most of our children failed admission test for Young Horizon School and only three boys managed to get admitted there, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

It became also more and more apparent that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] need special attention and care, as they are weak in all subjects. [REDACTED], even though a good student could not adjust to the boarding school situation in Sunshine School, Kurseong and we had to re-admit him to Apolos' Academy.

(iv) Medical – One of the main medical problems of the last year was a tumour that had developed in [REDACTED]'s inner ear. Even after the successful removal of the same a cavity remained, which is a hotbed for potential infections now. This is a permanent threat for his ear and he must be extremely careful for the rest of his life. Many other children too complained this year about ear infections, but besides this there were no other major medical problems in the past year and the minor diseases and ailments were limited to the common cold and the usual bruises and fractures which are associated with sports in general and football in particular. Our general physician Dr. Mondal tried to keep all this in check and continued with his monthly examinations of our children, recording weight and height together with other health related data minutely in our health file. This way the overall improvement of the state of health of our children as well as a healthy weight gain was once again well documented. Further to this we managed to get health insurance coverage for all our children and staff this year, which is a huge improvement for our project.

(v) Sports and related Activities – Besides a good school education, sports and especially football remain the top most priorities of the ASKMSC. With the foundation of our own football club 'FC Kolkata' at the end of the previous financial year we had entered a new level in our attempt to combine charity with football. Our boys were divided into three teams of different age groups, U16, U14 and U12 respectively and with Marbyn Molina from Honduras we were also able to get another foreign volunteer again to coach our teams. Throughout the year many matches could be arranged and even the playground issue of the past could be resolved with a nearby ground being made available for our boys.

Another sport gained more and more importance in ASKMSC within the last year. Volleyball was played extensively in our own courtyard and matches were organised with other teams. Besides that there were a lot of other sports and activities again during this year, such as athletics, badminton, yoga, etc. Further to this a run to the campus of Victoria Boys School from Kurseong town during our annual stay in the hills, has become a tradition and is now heavily contested every year by all the older boys.

(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music – In their free time our children were always left with many choices to pass the time. From the usual games to courses such as electronics, computer, cooking, tailoring, book reading, and many more. In arts and music there also used to be many ways to pass away time, like theatre, Tabla, guitar, drawing classes, dance lessons and more, but many of these

activities ceased to exist over time due to lack of interested by the children or lack of part time teachers or both. Also due to more pressure in school the children need more time for studies. Fortunately there are still some enthusiasts like our respected Vice-President and artist Ms. Sudeshna Mitra Battig who gives special weekly arts classes for the most talented of our boys, or Ms. Annelies Ghosh who holds her daily arts & crafts workshop every year over the winter months.

(vii) Birthday – It has been nine years on 19th of November 2009 since the first ten street children moved into our project and as every year we celebrate this day as the birthday of our children. As always it was a day filled with games, fun and entertainment for the children and guests, but unfortunately some people from the locality spoilt the day when they pretended to be invited guests and walked away with the packed food intended for dinner. Therefore our children were left with next to nothing to eat on the evening of their special day. This sad incident will force us to be stricter about admission by invitation cards in the next year!

(viii) Meals – Regarding meals there has been no change in the last year. The children are still served mainly a choice of vegetable and dal curries with rice for lunch and dinner and sometimes roti is given instead of rice. Fish curry is served 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 curries with soybean flakes are offered for further protein intake. Both lunch and dinner are supplemented by salad. Milk and cereals are given in the morning and we also continue to supply the children with fruits for the daily snack break at 5 o'clock.

(ix) Excursions – Besides our traditional annual excursions to Puri at the seaside in summer and to Makaibari Tea Estate in the hills during autumn we enjoyed a three days boat trip to the Sundarbans in February 2010. All the elder boys of ASKMSC, who were able to swim, were allowed to come along. The children were very excited about this trip and luck was with them when they spotted a real tiger near our boat. Further to this there had also been a few outings and day trips to various places again throughout the year and as every year there had been a picnic with games, food and fun at the beginning of February 2010.

(x) Volunteers – By now there is a long tradition of volunteers from India and abroad in ASKMSC. First and foremost the initiator and founder of our organisation, respected Mr. Wolfgang Muller has to be mentioned here, who tirelessly and with enthusiasm helped our project ever since it started. He also set up our sister charity the NGO “Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens

Strassenkinder e. V.” in his country of origin Germany, which has always been the main financial pillar of our society. Another regular volunteer from Germany is our arts and crafts teacher Ms. Annelies Ghosh, who has regularly contributed to our charity. There are also some volunteers from our neighbourhood who help with the homework and studies of our children. Further to this our respected Vice-President and artist Ms. Sudeshna Mitra Battig gives special art classes for the most talented amongst our children.

3. Finances:

The financial situation of our society was quite sound again in the past financial year, with the German NGO “Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.” once more being the guarantor for stable and reliable flow of funds, but after some gap we also got some financial support from the British organisation “A.S.K. Children’s’ Trust” again. Further to this the German NGO continued to arrange personal sponsors for our children, besides the regular contributions for maintenance and up-keep.

There were also some local monetary contributions to our society again and on several occasions people would sponsor a meal for the children. Also some local clubs as well as private donors contributed clothes again. Besides that there were the annual membership fees of the members.

4. Outlook:

In the coming year we would finally like to focus on the third phase of our mission, the village project. It is imperative now to separate the older boys from the younger and have an alternative place to accommodate them. It would also help our football project to further improve, if there was a full size playground included in that village campus. Further to this our campus in Santoshpur would need a fresh paint job and a few renovations. It would also be desirable to have some more admissions again to progress our main aim of helping some more street children.