

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2014-15

1. Introduction

The financial year 2014-15 saw the untimely demise of our beloved long serving secretary and co-founder of the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) Sri Pranab Kr. Das. Since the foundation of our society in February 1998 he had been a pillar of the work and service to humanity rendered by us. His early and sudden demise in June'14 weighed heavy on the minds of everyone, children and adults alike and had a strong influence on the course of things throughout the year and certainly things will never be the same again without him! It has therefore been a very hard and difficult year for our society even more though since we were already facing difficult times due to the pending license issue with the Directorate of Social Welfare.

2. Activities

(i) General – While the previous financial year ended on an uneasy note after the decision to close down our home until the license issue with the Directorate of Social Welfare would be sorted out the new financial year started with a catastrophe. Sri Pranab Kumar Das one of the founders of the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* and long serving secretary of our society all in a sudden got sick and died soon after.

Sri Pranab Kumar Das had been with our society from day one, when Sri Wolfgang Muller a German national and student of Jadavpur University had suggested shortly after the tragic demise of his friend Ali Salem Khalifa in 1997 to set up a charity to help destitute children and name it after his friend. Mr. Muller was willing to provide the necessary funds and so a few months later in February 1998 seven people came together in Mr. Muller's flat in Santoshpur to form the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children*. One of them was Sri Pranab Kumar Das who was very enthusiastic about the idea from the onset. He therefore gave his heart and soul for the project from the beginning and worked for more than seven years for the cause as a volunteer without any remuneration. He was like a father for the children and loved by everyone. Only after his marriage and birth of his son in 2005 he was forced to ask for a modest honorarium for his work and contribution to the society in order to maintain his own family and still be able to give his full support to the project. He helped to remove some criminal elements from within the society and saved the project from a complete takeover by property sharks. After many years as the president of our society he became the secretary in September'06. As such he continued to protect the project relentlessly against the attempts of those criminal elements to destroy our society while looking after the needs of our children. He will be forever remembered!

In the course of this deeply saddening and painful year another five of our boys turned 18 and left our home in Santoshpur. Four of them became part of our 'Aftercare Program' while one left to stand on his own feet. In total five boys left the care and support of our society altogether in the past year.

Further progress was made in the educational field when another seven boys got their class X results in May'14 and all passed with good to very good results. Six of them went on for their higher secondary education. Now already a total of 15 boys have cleared their Class X exams, which can be considered a huge success for our work. Moreover at the end of the school year another two of our boys set for their class X board exams and for the first time seven attempted class XII. Their results should be out by the end of May'15. Altogether 35 boys attended school with the financial support of ASKMSC at the beginning of the year while for various reasons only 30 children were attending school with the financial support of our society at the end of it.

Apart from education sports in general and football in particular have always been an important part of our society and despite the fact that the football project of our society had become perceivably smaller in recent times our team 'FC Kolkata' was still quite successful and the win of the 'German Consulate Cup' in March'15 was the absolute highlight of the past year.

In the same month a detailed report was submitted with the Directorate of Social Welfare together with a new application for renewal of our license in order to remove one of the major obstacles in our efforts to help destitute children. It is hoped that there will finally be some movement in this matter, so that we can revive our project and help more children. In the meantime the number of children in our home in Santoshpur has come down substantially and might reach zero soon. With a renewed license we could start with a new generation of destitute children in our home and if things would go as planned it would be girls this time.

Our annual picnic was this time jointly organized with the boys of Lilua's Anti Child Labour Project and PBKOJB Boy's Home at the Dhakuria Lakes, which is in the tradition of previous cooperation amongst our three NGOs. It was enjoyed by everyone.

Playing the guitar, singing and listening to music is still the favourite past time in our home and Austrian artist and musician Mr. Frizzey Greif who travels the world to promote his World Peace Project 'Frizzey Light' recorded a song together with our boys which was released in June'14.

The annual birthday celebration of all our children on 19th of November'14 once again was a low key event due to a small number of children in the home as well as important school exams on the same day. A day after the event a huge outbreak of Dengue fever affected almost everyone staff and children alike. It was one of several health related problems during the year.

The year 2014-15 also saw the visit of quite a few foreign delegations, volunteers and well-wishers again. We thank them all for their help and support during these sad and dark times.

(ii) Problems faced by us – It is impossible to describe what it means for a small project like ours when a major pillar all in a sudden is no more. Apart from the shock for the members of our society, the staff, the children and all the supporters and well-wishers in India and abroad it also meant the danger of a complete breakdown of practically everything from daily running of the project to the administrative work. Bank accounts were no more accessible. Staff was fast opting out for other job opportunities fearing a shut down. But in the end all members set down together and finalised a plan for a transition, which eventually worked out. Nevertheless times are very difficult without our long-serving secretary. He had prepared a detailed report in response to the letter sent to us by the Directorate of Social Welfare hoping that he could finally get our license to run a home for former street children renewed after the DSW had simply ignored all our applications for renewal since 2008. Unfortunately he was no more able to submit the same due to his sudden illness. Sri Caesar Sen who took over as the secretary was asked by the members to study the report and he eventually submitted it along with a new application for renewal of our license in March'15. It remains to be seen whether there will be any progress now in this matter in the coming year, but it is hoped to be able to help more destitute children in the future once the license issue is sorted out.

Further to this it would have been a miracle if a catastrophe like the sudden death of our secretary would have no impact on the children. With him always having been like a father for all these children it was as if some of them got orphaned a second time in their lives! As a result many began to show behavioural problems again and a total of three children got expelled from their respective schools. In another case one of our boys started to show signs of bipolar disorder and had to be admitted to a mental hospital for intensive counselling as well as medication over the school holidays. His school has indicated at the end of the school year that they will not be able to readmit him for the new session as they do not see themselves able to deal with his mental disorder. Similarly another one of our boys was also told to find a new school after the final exams due to behavioural problems, but he might be allowed to shift to another branch of the same school as a compromise.

(iii) Education – Another four boys were admitted to different boarding schools to do their higher secondary, two to Douglas Memorial Higher Secondary School, Barrackpore and one each to Aditya Academy School, Kadambogachi and Himali Boarding School, Kurseong. This means a total of 23 boys studied in various boarding schools in the beginning of the financial year, while 10 attended two nearby schools which are Apollos

Academy and Young Horizons School. In addition to that two boys of our Raidighi branch went to a Bengali medium school there. Altogether this means a total of 35 children went to school with the support of ASKMSC at the beginning of the past financial year and they attended the following schools and classes:

Indira Gandhi Memorial High School

Class XII	Sudhir Dhopi, Suraj Dhopi, Chottu Shaw, Pintu Das, Kishore Halder, Raju Chakraborty
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Apollos Academy

Class XI	Jagannath Das,
Class X	Sanu Singh

Young Horizon School

Class XI	Suman Deb
Class X	Banti Sharma
Class VIII	Raja Ratha, Chandan Das, Tapos Ghosh, Babu Ghosh,
Class VII	Biswajit Sarder
Class VI	Somnath Maity

Aditya Academy

Class XI	Gour Halder
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Douglas Memorial Higher Secondary School

Class XI	Ashim Mondal, Somnath Mistri
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Ramkrishna Sarada Mission School

Class X	Pradip Das
Class IX	Abul Sheikh
Class VIII	Bubai Yadav, Manoj Biswas, Pintu Shaw
Class VII	Biswanath Maity, Raja Das, Sahid Naskar
Class VI	Ravi Yadav, Samir Mondal

Himali Boarding School, Kurseong

Class XII	Subhasish Mondal
Class XI	Vicky Sharma
Class VIII	Sourav Dey

Holy Home School, Serampur

Class VIII	Raquib Purkait
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Sriphaltala F. P. School, Raidighi

Class III	Sk. Saforid, Sukhdev Naskar
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Unfortunately three of our boys got expelled from their respective schools during the year and for two of them it was already the second time they had to leave a school due to behavioural problems. Another boy was withdrawn from our home by his mother while one of the young adults got employed by our society and started to pay himself for his school fees. So of the initial 35 boys who attended school with the financial support of ASKMSC at the beginning of the year only 30 children were attending school with the financial support of our society at the end. Another two boys were told at the end of the school year that they would have to find a new school in the coming year, as they would not be allowed for re-admission in the coming session, once again due to behavioural problems. On the positive side all the 7 boys who set for their class X board exams at the end of the last financial year passed some of them with excellent results. Of these boys only one decided to leave school as well as our home to start to work while the other six went on for their two years of higher secondary studies.

Further to this for the first time in the history of the ASKMSC children of our society were sitting for their higher secondary exams in March'15. A total of 7 boys have appeared for their class XII board exams and their results are eagerly awaited. Another two boys appeared for their class X board exams at the end of the financial year and their results too are awaited.

(iv) Medical – After several years without any major health problems we were really hit hard in the past year. Besides the tragic death of our secretary Sri Pranab Kr. Das in June'14 we had to deal with a severe outbreak of Dengue Fever in Santosphur in the month of November'14. Most of the children and staff were affected and two of the children had to be hospitalised. It took quite some time for everyone to fully recover.

In another serious incident one of our boys almost got electrocuted after getting accidentally in contact with a live wire. He had to be hospitalized where he was monitored for some time.

Another child had a benign tumour in his chest which had to be removed by minor surgery. He was hospitalised for some days in June'14.

In another sad development our general physician of the last 14 years Dr. Biswajit Mondal retired in December'14. His monthly check-ups in our home have mainly contributed to the positive state of health over the

years. We thank Dr. Mondal for all these years of support!

With the opening of the new KPC hospital in Jadavpur we have decided to send our children there for check-up in the future while all minor injuries due to sport, such as strained muscles or ligament issues are all treated free of charge by a physiotherapist of a nearby private hospital.

(v) Sports and related Activities – With the dwindling number of inmates in our home it was getting more and more difficult for us to continue with team sports such as football or volleyball in the past year, as more often than not the minimum number of players to get a team together was not available. Therefore jogging or badminton became the sport of choice. But this did not mean the end of our football project. The remaining boys in the home together with their coach Mr. Marbyn Molina from Honduras joined CTM a nearby Brazilian organisation to train with them twice a week and when ever there was a match or tournament coming up they called up some of their brothers from the boarding schools to complete their team. This way our team ‘*FC Kolkata*’ was able to stay alive and went on to win trophies for our trophy cabinet with the highlight being the win of the ‘German Consulate Cup’ in March’15 on the CC&FC ground. FIFA licensed Swiss Youth Coach Mr. Christoph Gobeli of the Swiss Super League Club ‘Young Boys Bern’ also managed to give some training sessions to our boys again in the past year.

(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music – Listening to or making their own music is still the number one time pass during leisure hours for all of our children. Many of our boys have learned to play the guitar well and we therefore had to increase the number of guitars available. Austrian musician Mr. Frizzey Greif completed editing of the song ‘Be Strong’ which he had recorded together with our boys. The same was released in June’14 and can be seen on ‘Youtube’.

Our library too had to be stocked up with some more books as reading besides music is another passion with our children in their free time.

With the declining number of children in our home there are nowadays fewer organised activities and courses on offer to spend one’s free time. So apart from listening to music or reading a book it has become very popular to play a quiet game of chess or just do some projects in our computer room. Over the winter months Ms. Annelies Ghosh invited everyone who was interested over to her nearby flat for some activities in arts & crafts.

(vii) Birthday – For the same reasons like the previous year the annual birthday celebration of all our children on 19th November 2014 had to be a low key event again, since most children were in boarding schools at the time and an important exam was scheduled for the same day as well as the next for those who were present. Nevertheless the house was decorated to the occasion and there was a birthday cake as well as a few guests to

welcome the kids after exams. Some alumni also showed up for the little function and enjoyed the special dinner with us.

(viii) Meals – We serve on three days per week egg curry for lunch or dinner, twice a week fish curry, once a week chicken curry and all other meals are served with a choice of vegetable curries and pulses with soybean flakes for additional protein intake. Vegetables vary as per the season, but there is always a well balanced diet throughout the year. There are cereals with milk or butter toast with jelly for breakfast and the children get a ‘school tiffin to go’ to bridge the time until the main rice meal at lunch time. Everyday different fruits are given during the afternoon break while there is another main rice meal with curries for dinner. We also provide an additional snack on days with football training when need for calories is high.

(ix) Excursions – Besides a few visits to our country project in Raidighi by some or all of the boys and a few day-outings there were no major excursions in the past year. Our annual picnic we once again did together with the boys of Lilua’s Anti Child Labour Project and PBKOJB Boy’s Home in January’15. This time it was organised by PBKOJB Boy’s Home and ASKMSC jointly. The picnic took place at nearby Dhakuria Lakes and was a complete success.

(x) Volunteers – From the beginning of the ASKMSC we frequently get local as well as foreign volunteers who are kind enough to sacrifice their free time and holidays to serve our project without remuneration. Some of them come regularly for years to help at a particular time of the year while others even give their support throughout the year. Amongst them first of all should be mentioned Mr. Jonathan Nowitzky from Germany who helped to look after our project together with a grown-up former child of our project Jagannath Das during the state of emergency when our beloved Secretary Sri Pranab Kr. Das was hospitalized in Delhi and respected initiator and founder of our organisation Mr. Wolfgang Muller also from Germany was at his bedside to look after him. During these sad days Jonathan and Jagannath managed to keep the project working despite the grave situation. A special thanks goes out to both of them! Some regular volunteers such as eighty years old Mr. Karl Neulichedl and his daughter Ms. Margareth Nackler or Ms. Karolina Gummerer all from Italy as well as Mr. and Ms. Otremba from Germany came again for different periods over the year to keep the house clean and organised and wherever help was required. Ms. Otremba even came a second time after the tragic death of our secretary to give support during these dark hours. Mr. Marbyn Molina from Honduras continued his support for our football project with his regular practice with our boys and FIFA licensed Youth Coach Mr. Christoph Gobeli from Switzerland came again to train with our teams. Austrian musician Mr. Frizzey Greif recorded a song with our

children called “Be Strong” and Ms. Annelies Ghosh from Germany held her annual arts & crafts workshop again. As every year we would like to thank all the mentioned and unmentioned volunteers for their contribution and help!

(xi) Country Project – After the untimely death of Sri Pranab Kr. Das we put on a halt any further admissions for our country project in Raidighi and after one of the two boys placed there was withdrawn by his mother we even considered to close it down completely. Currently it is used as an ‘Aftercare Unit’ to accommodate the 18 years and above young adults during school holidays, but its future is yet to be decided. The decision amongst other factors mainly depends on the renewal of the license by the DSW for our Santoshpur unit.

3. Finances

Once again the full annual budget for the financial year was provided by our sister charity and partner in Germany the “*Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.*” Nevertheless cautious financial planning will be required in the coming financial year due to a sharp fall in the value of the Euro. The shortage of funds at the end of the last quarter of the past financial year related to the low value of the Euro should already be a warning to revive other sources of income to make up for the shortfall. On the other hand the annual expenditure should come down as well in the coming year with the falling number of children. This means a lower annual budget should be required.

Besides the financial support of the “*ali sk e. V.*” there have been a few local donations and sponsored meals again in the past year as well as the annual membership fees of our members.

4. Outlook

After such a sad year it is very difficult to give a positive outlook for the future of our society. More than ever things will depend on the renewal of our license by the Directorate of Social Welfare. As long as no progress is achieved in his matter our work has to focus on getting our young adults to stand on their feet rather than starting with a new generation of destitute children.