

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2015-16

1. Introduction

The financial year 2015-16 was the first year after 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. It was marked by our constant attempts to get things into calm waters again after his tragic death. In retrospect we can say now that we have managed over the year to get everything organised again and that we are now able to concentrate on our main focus once more, our children who more and more turn into young adults and need help and guidance to earn their livelihood and to find their right place in society.

2. Activities

(i) General – After the extremely saddening and painful financial year 2014-15, which threatened the very existence of our organisation we were able to reorganise our home for former street children in Santoshpur and could also open a new ‘Aftercare Unit’ in Picnic Garden for our increasing number of young adults. We also decided to close down our Raidighi Branch, since there seemed to be no scope in establishing a new boy’s home under the current circumstances. And even so we were running the Raidighi Branch instead as a temporary ‘Aftercare Unit’ for some time it was not really practical due to the long distance from Kolkata. In May’15 seven of our young adults had received their higher secondary results and while two of them had failed their board exams it still meant that for the first time in the history of our society five of our boys could go to college now, if they so desired. In any case they needed to find out about their future options and that turned out to be very difficult from Raidighi. They needed access to the job market and educational institutions of Kolkata and this simply was too much travelling from there.

Things improved after the shift of our ‘Aftercare Unit’ to Picnic Garden in September’15 and soon after the boys became more successful in finding options for their future. Also during the year another two boys turned 18 and left our home in Santoshpur for the said ‘Aftercare Unit’. And besides the seven young adults who had received their higher secondary results two other boys were eagerly waiting for the marks of their class X exams. Both of them passed with good results and went on to two different boarding schools to complete their higher secondary. Now already a total of 17 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 six of our boys set for their class XII board exams. Their results should be out by the end of May’16. Besides that two boys had to change their

school at the beginning of the year due to behavioural problems and so altogether 24 boys attended school with the financial support of ASKMSC throughout the year.

The focus on sports in our home over all those years turned out to be a boon and after leaving school our young adults looked for careers with sports companies such as 'Decathlon Sports India Pvt. Ltd.', sports related courses at college such as 'International Sports Management' or simply started to play professional football. Also playing 'Futsal' tournaments became very popular with our team 'FC Kolkata' after winning the German Consulate Cup last year. The price money earned in these tournaments made for a good extra income for them and our team became more and more popular. Even the German National Student Football Team got aware of us and wanted to play a match with us in January'16.

Playing the guitar, singing and listening to music is still the favourite past time in our home and over time some guitars 'left' our house for the 'Aftercare Unit' or different boarding schools. We therefore had to get some more guitars for our home in Santoshpur. The excitement for making music also benefited our annual birthday celebration this year. The boys took the organisation of the event in their own hands and after two low key events in the previous two years due to a small numbers of children in the home this year on 19th November practically all boys and some guests were present and got to see an exciting program of music, dance, theatre, recitations and speeches.

In January'16 we got an offer to keep and use a baking oven until it was required back by the owner. We happily agreed to this offer and a mentally retarded boy of our Santoshpur home who had received baking training in a German Bakery in Kolkata for six month took over the oven with great enthusiasm and started to bake cookies and cakes as well as bread for our home and for visitors and guests, volunteers and well-wishers and foreign delegations who came again in numbers throughout the year. Even a Spanish researcher came for two months to do some research about our project. We also had the honour to receive Mr. Bernhard Pfister the President of our German sister charity the "*Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.*", who came with a delegation of 7 people at the end of February'16 to inspect our project. He and his delegation were very impressed by the development of our children and young adults, but unfortunately we still could not give them any hope to start helping new children. The reason for this is that despite all the positive development of the past year once again no progress could be made about the pending license issue with the Directorate of Social Welfare. Therefore we have to continue with the process of closing down our home. No new admissions will be possible until and unless the license issue is resolved.

(ii) Problems faced by us – One of the main problems of the past year was to stabilize the project again after the sudden and untimely demise of

our beloved long serving secretary Sri Pranab Kr. Das and get everything working again on a routine basis. We were able to hire new staff and also could finally rent a nearby flat for our young adults. We therefore closed our Raidighi branch, which at the end had served as a temporary 'Aftercare Unit' and shifted the same to the new flat. Now it became easier to cater to the needs of the young adults and we were better able to help them to find the right direction for their future lives. Now every case could be considered on an individual basis and solutions about what they could do to earn their livelihood could be found according to the talents and predispositions of each of them separately.

So with daily life getting more organised again everything would have been ok if not for the mental problem of one of our children in the home. The boy was diagnosed with bipolar disorder some time ago and is now a regular in Antara Psychiatric Hospital for counselling and treatment. For his behavioural problems caused by the disease he had already been sacked by Young Horizons School the previous year and we had to find a school for him which tolerated his frequent and long absence due to treatment in the hospital. We solved the problem by admitting him to Apollos Academy School, but it was still a huge challenge to deal with the boy at home on a daily basis. His behaviour got our regular staff so annoyed that they threatened to quit and there was always tension because of him throughout the year. Similar problems could be avoided with another boy who had also been told that he could no longer stay in the boarding school where he had studied the previous year. He was sent back to stay with his mother and was shifted to a nearby branch of the same school which is for day scholars only. He now commutes every day between school and his mothers place and seems to be fine with it.

The license issue of many years with the Directorate of Social Welfare could once again not be resolved in the past financial year, but at least one inspector from the DSW called in December'15 to let us know he would come for inspection within the next two days. Unfortunately again nothing happened after that and so we are still left with the pending license problem.

(iii) Education – After two more boys passed the class X board exams we were able to admit them also to good boarding schools for their higher secondary education during the past year. One boy joined class XI of Himali Boarding School, Kurseong and one boy was admitted to Sudhir Memorial Institute School, Madhyamgram. As a disciplinary measure by Holy Home Boarding School, Serampore, one of our boys was shifted by them to their branch in Tollygunge, which is for day scholars only while one boy had to be shifted from Young Horizons School to Apollos Academy. In addition to that one boy went to a Bengali medium school in Ramkrishnapur. This means a total of 14 boys studied in various boarding schools at the beginning of the financial year while 10 attended day schools, such as nearby Apollos Academy and Young Horizons School.

Since one of them is in the meantime employed by our society and pays more or less for his own school fees with a few exceptions, e.g. exam fees, one can say that altogether this means a total of 23+1 children and young adults went to school with the support of ASKMSC at the beginning of the past financial year. They attended the following schools and classes:

Apollos Academy

Class XII	Jagannath Das,
Class IX	Babu Ghosh

Young Horizon School

Class XII	Suman Deb
Class IX	Raja Ratha, Chandan Das, Tapos Ghosh
Class VIII	Biswajit Sarder
Class VII	Somnath Maity

Holy Home Day School

Class IX	Raquib Purkait
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Sudhir Memorial Institute

Class XI	Sanu Singh
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Aditya Academy

Class XII	Gour Halder
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Douglas Memorial Higher Secondary School

Class XII	Ashim Mondal, Somnath Mistri
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Ramkrishna Sarada Mission School

Class IX	Bubai Yadav, Manoj Biswas, Pintu Shaw
Class VIII	Biswanath Maity, Raja Das, Sahid Naskar
Class VII	Ravi Yadav

Himali Boarding School, Kurseong

Class XII	Vicky Sharma
Class XI	Banti Sharma
Class IX	Sourav Dey

Class IV	Sukhdev Naskar
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Further to this a total of seven boys got their class XII results in May' 15 and despite the fact that two of the seven failed it can still be considered a huge success that for the first time in our home four boys passed their CBSE higher secondary exams while one boy cleared the ISC exams. Of these seven young adults four went on to play professional football for the time being while two of them were looking for jobs. Of them one was able to secure an excellent job with Decathlon Sports India Pvt. Ltd. and is now based in Delhi while the other one is still searching. The remaining young man who had passed ISC exams showed a determination to study Aeronautics in Germany and was able to secure a sponsored German language course at Max Muller Bhavan, the German cultural institution in Kolkata.

It can already be seen that the decision to run our home for former street children side by side as a sports academy at a very early stage back in the year 2003 is paying off, as this seems to give them an extra edge for job opportunities. It is hoped that the six young adults who have appeared for their class XII board exams at the end of this financial year will also profit from this fact. Already two of them have shown interested to go on for higher studies in 'International Sports Management'. It will be interesting to see what the next year will bring in this regard. In any case the results of their higher secondary exams are eagerly awaited.

(iv) Medical – After a year with serious health problems things calmed down again and besides the usual minor injuries due to sport, common cold and skin problems, etc. luckily nothing serious happened throughout the year 2015-16.

Ever since our general physician of 14 years Dr. Biswajit Mondal retired in December' 14 we were sending our children to the nearby KPC Hospital for check-ups and this turned out to be a good alternative as the hospital is very close and there are all kinds of specialists available. Even 24 hours emergency services are good and all the fees are nominal.

For the mental wellbeing we employ a Child Psychologist who comes once a week or on demand. Besides listening to all the problems within the home she helps us to deal with our boy with bipolar disorder. Thanks to her we have established a good relationship with Antara Psychiatric Hospital where the boy goes for regular therapy, medication and if so required for indoor treatment.

(v) Sports and related Activities – Nowadays many of our children are in good boarding schools and they all become main pillars in the sport teams of their respective school. This is not only the case for football, but many

other sports such as volleyball, badminton, table tennis and more. Moreover they helped their schools to win many prizes. So sport is always present in the lives of our children, even beyond the gates of our home.

And of course for the few who are still present in our home throughout the year and those who stay in our 'Aftercare Unit' there is still regular football practice on offer with our coach Mr. Marbyn Molina from Honduras as well as with the Brazilian organisation CTM who practice nearby. And it is the boys themselves these days who organise a lot of friendly matches for our team '*FC Kolkata*' or participate in tournaments all over Kolkata. In the past year it has also become very fashionable for them to participate in '*Futsal*' tournaments, a simplified version of football with only 5 players per team. After winning the German Consulate Cup in '*Futsal*' last year our team became so popular that even the German National Student Football Team wanted to play a match with us during their visit of Kolkata in January'16. Unfortunately there was no full size playground available at that time and the match had to be cancelled.

Apart from that we also took part in the PBKOJB's Sports Day event and played some friendly matches in volleyball as well. Further to this FIFA licensed Swiss Youth Coach Mr. Christoph Gobeli of the Swiss Super League Club 'Young Boys Bern' who gives every year some training sessions to our boys is so impressed by one of our players, that he plans to bring him to Switzerland to practice for three months with his club there. This would be another great success for our football project after the two boys who had been invited to practice in Munich with German football giant FC Bayern Munich in 2008 and 2011 respectively.

(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music – As for the children's free time not much has changed to the previous year. Listening to or making their own music is still the number one time pass during leisure hours for all of our children. Since some of the boys who went to attend boarding schools for the first time took along a guitar we had to buy another two for the home and as always we have added a few books to our library as reading books is still in vogue.

With the arrival of a baking oven it has become very popular to bake cakes and cookies and of course to eat them! Cooking too is a hobby of many amongst the boys and is seriously considered a career opportunity by some.

Apart from that children use their free time for programming and other projects in computer room or play quiet board games, such as ludo, chess, etc. Sadly Annelies & Gora Ghosh who used to hold workshops in arts & crafts in our home or in their nearby flat over the winter months for the last ten years could not come from Germany anymore due to their age and health. But inspired by their teachings some of our children still ask for arts material to be creative on their own.

(vii) Birthday – This year's 19th November the day we celebrate as the

birthday of all our children was completely organised by the children and young adults themselves and contrary to the previous year this time there was a significant number of boys in the home as some of them had not yet returned to their respective boarding schools or had come back for this particular day only. The boys decorated the house, organised games & quiz competition, invited a few guests for the cake cutting ceremony and the evening program and even the special dinner they helped to prepare. Between the entertainment program of theatre, songs and recitations those of the boys who had completed ten years with us held little speeches about their time in the home and all in all it was a wonderful day which everybody enjoyed!

(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 – In the past year many of our boys went to the Sundarbans for a football camp with our coach Mr. Molina and they also went for a picnic with their school, but apart from that there were once again no major outings or excursions. Even our annual picnic could not be organised this year, but we hope to be able to have more activities of this kind again in the coming year.

(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 the respected initiator and founder of our organisation Mr. Wolfgang Muller from Germany who has been helping from the onset and without whom ASKMSC would not exist. Another volunteer who helps us throughout the year since many years is Mr. Marbyn Molina from Honduras who continued his support for our football project with his regular practice with our boys. Some other regular volunteers are FIFA licensed Youth Coach Mr. Christoph Gobeli from Switzerland who came again to train with our boys or Mr. Karl Neulichedl and his daughter Ms. Margareth Nackler or Ms. Karolina Gummerer all from Italy who come almost every year for some time to help us keep the

house clean and organised. Again others came for the first time like Ms. Lara Ruiz from Spain who spent two months in Kolkata for some research and took the chance to teach our children how to make homemade soap. As every year we would like to thank all the mentioned and unmentioned volunteers for their contribution and help! But special thanks go out this year to Annelies & Gora Ghosh from Germany! For more than ten years they used to hold arts & crafts workshops with our children every year over the winter months, but due to old age and health related problems they will not be able to come anymore to Kolkata. We will miss them badly and will never forget their contribution to our project!

(xi) Aftercare Unit – During the last year it was decided not to renew the rent agreement with the Raidighi landlord after the 3 years agreement had expired. This meant the end of our ‘country project’ and all the plans to establish a new home for boys in Raidighi. Instead a flat in Picnic Garden was rented to set up an ‘Aftercare Unit’ for the 18 years and above young adults. So when the Raidighi project closed for good seven young adults who had been temporarily sheltered there shifted to the new flat in Picnic Garden. Guided by us they now organise their lives themselves while looking for jobs or college.

3. Finances

In the past financial year the major financial support came once again from our sister charity and partner in Germany the “*Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.*”, but due to the fall in the value of the Euro we had also approached a former donor of our society the organisation H.E.L.G.O. e.V. in Hamburg for further funds and could successfully secure an additional amount to guarantee the financial soundness of our project over the year. And since at the same time the annual expenditure of our society came down significantly due to the smaller number of children in school and the falling number of children in the project there was never any danger of budgetary problems or financial bottlenecks throughout the year. With the exchange rate stable there should be also no problems in the coming year, particularly since the annual expenditure should further come down. Further to this there have also been a few local contributions and sponsored meals again apart from the annual membership fees of our members.

4. Outlook

In the future it will be our main task to get more of our young adults established in life. For each individual case we have to find an individual solution according to his abilities and personal talents. Of course we will continue to try to sort out the problem with the Directorate of Social Welfare for the renewal of our license, but as long as no progress is made in this matter we cannot start with a new generation of destitute children. Further to this it will also depend on the renewal of our FCRA registration whether we continue with our work altogether or whether we have to close down for good.