

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2018-19

1. Introduction

In the past financial year the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) was again devoted to the task of transforming the lives and future prospects of our children and young adults. We continued our efforts to extend help and guidance to them to earn their livelihood and to find their right place in the society. A record number of boys sat for their board exams last year and some more turned 18. Furthermore again a few of them left the financial support of our organisation altogether and got fully integrated and established in mainstream society.

2. Activities

(i) General – The *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* financially supported a total number of 24 children and young adults during the past financial year 2018-19 of which 17 went to various schools, boards and classes while the rest went to college, received training, did a foreign language course or prepared for studies abroad. In May'18 another two of our children had received their secondary results and both of them had passed and went on to Himali Boarding School, Kurseong to complete their higher secondary education in the hills. Also by the end of the year we had a record number of 14 children sitting for class X and XII board exams. Never before in the history of our society so many children were able to do so.

Apart from the financial support for these 24 children and young adults an even higher number received life guidance, help and advice when ever required. While this support for our children and young adults was once again our main focus in the past year our attention was also on the ongoing repair and renovation work were we tried to involve some of our young adults as much as possible in order to give them a chance to earn some money to support themselves while in college. Volunteers too helped with the different repair work and taught our young adults how to do it. This way paint work on the outside of the buildings as well as all the rooms could be finished in the past year. Railings and grills and also all the beds got a new coating too within the year. Major work to overhaul the electric wiring of our office building has commenced by the end of the year and should be completed soon. Landscaping and gardening was also initiated again together with our boys to improve the overall look of our home for former street children. A main job remaining now for the coming year is the refurbishing of all the toilets and bathrooms in the two buildings.

In our 'Aftercare Unit' in Picnic Garden another generation change was on the way again when more of our boys turned 18 last year and once again we faced the problem of separation from the ASKMSC family at the end

of the year when older boys did not want to move out to make space for them, even though they had the means to do so. Further to this finding part-time and full-time jobs, troubles in college, noise and dust in our home during renovation and health related issues caused smaller or bigger problems again throughout the year.

The 19th of November was celebrated in big style again as *the* 'Birthday' of all our children to commemorate the day the first ten street children moved into our home in 2000. Also a picnic was organised once again jointly with PBKOJP's Boys Home in winter and for the first time in many years we were able to organise some excursions again. Sport continued to play its important roll during the year with a two days inter-home sports competition in various disciplines being the highlight. This too was organised jointly by PBKOJP's Boys Home and our boys in continuation of the long standing cooperation between our two NGOs.

The total expenditure to finance all these activities decreased again in the past year and was mainly financed by our sister charity and partner in Germany the "*Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.*" who also supported us with volunteers.

(ii) Problems faced by us – The problem of separation from the Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children for our young adults popped up again at the end of the year when seniors amongst the young adults in our Aftercare Unit demanded that we start another new Aftercare Unit somewhere else for those who turned 18, so that they could stay in our current Aftercare Unit in comfort even though they had the means to move out and start their own lives. After a meeting with them another three of them eventually agreed to rent and finance a place of their own soon and give a chance to the junior ones to move into our existing Aftercare Unit. We have also realized in the past year that our first batch with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) had massive problems fulfilling the assignments and study requirements including registering online for exams and readmission for the next semester in time, because they could not cope with the fact that they had to be proactive and do things on their own initiative rather than waiting for someone else to do everything for them like in school. Also studying by oneself using books rather than attending regular classes needed a lot of self-discipline which they apparently did not have. Therefore one of the four shifted to a college with regular classes and two discontinued with their studies altogether. Only one still continued with IGNOU at the end of the year with limited success. We therefore have to be more vigilant with future candidates and make sure they deal better with the requirements for an open college such as IGNOU. And with so many of our boys finishing their school education at the end of this year the pressure to find the right courses, training or job to fit best the individual skills, interests and talents of each one of them will become an even bigger one for us in the coming year. Further to this finding part-time jobs for them, so that they do not have to depend for

everything on us is still a challenge, but networking with older brothers for job opportunities and offers to pay them for help with our ongoing repair and renovation work has considerably improved this.

Repair and renovation work went on throughout the past year and noise and dust continued to be a problem for the few boys who were still in our home in Santoshpur, but all in all it was not as bad as in the previous year as most of the ongoing work were paint jobs. Preparations for the board exams at the end of the year were therefore not hampered.

Unfortunately there were a lot of medical problems again throughout the year and the license issue of many years with the Directorate of Social Welfare could also once again not be resolved in the past financial year.

(iii) Education – In the past financial year a total of 17 children and young adults went to school with some or full support of ASKMSC. This was one more than in the previous year after a school drop out had decided to give it another chance by joining the National Institute of Open Schooling, NIOS. Since two had already joined earlier it was a total of three doing their senior secondary from NIOS altogether. Also only three of our children attended a day school at the beginning of the past year, which is one down from the year before. Of them one went to nearby Young Horizons School, one to Welkin School and one to Navadiganta Model High School under the Decathlon Sports India Programme for on the job training and higher secondary education. A total of eleven boys studied in two boarding schools. Of them three studied in Himali Boarding School in Kurseong, seven in Pearl Rosary School in Serampore and one in Nimpith Ramkrishna Vidyabhavan, Nimpith. In detail they attended the following schools and classes:

Navadiganta Model High School/Decathlon Sports India

Class XII	1
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Young Horizon School

Class X	1
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Welkin National School

Class XII	1
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Pearl Rosary School

Class XII	3
Class X	4

Himali Boarding School, Kurseong

Class XII	1
Class XI	2

Nimpith Ramkrishna Vidyabhavan

Class VI	1
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National Institute of Open Schooling

Class XII	3
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Two more boys of ASKMSC got the results of their higher secondary exams in May'18 and had passed it successfully. Both of them got a chance in Himali Boarding School, Kurseong which agreed to sponsor them for their higher secondary education. Two young adults left college last year as they could not cope with it and one changed to another college in the past year and so there were a total of six in college by year end studying different subjects.

At the end of the past financial year another nine boys gave their higher secondary board exams while five gave their secondary exams with various boards. All together 14 boys are eagerly awaiting now their results to come out in May'19. Should all of them pass we would have already helped 19 of our boys to achieve class XII and 15 to achieve class X as their highest educational qualification and only seven of our children would have not or would have not yet achieved minimum secondary level of education. This can already be considered a very good success rate, particularly since some of them might still reach a higher educational qualification.

One boy completed his one year training course in 'Entrepreneurship' with the French organisation Life Project for Youth (LP4Y) in November'18 and went on to join Decathlon as an intern while another one continued with his bakery training. Two young adults enrolled for the D-License course for football coaches offered by the Indian Football Association and completed it by the end of March'19 and are currently waiting for their results. Apart from that there are still two boys attending foreign language courses at various levels sponsored by the French cultural institute in Kolkata Alliance Française du Bengal and the German cultural instituted at Max Muller Bhavan.

(iv) Medical – Just like the year before the past year was once again a very bad one as far as medical problems were concerned. A total of five of our wards had to be hospitalized over the year for various reasons. There were two cases of typhoid again, a severe case of tonsillitis with high fever, a cruciate ligament rupture that needed surgery and a case of very

high fever that could not be explained and eventually responded to antibiotics. All spent 3 to 10 days in nearby KPC Hospital and could be eventually cured and they recovered fully. All were covered by health insurance under our Health Care Plan and were fully or for the main part paid for by health insurance, which showed once again the importance of having health insurance coverage for all our children as well as our staff to protect us from the financial impact of such unexpected medical emergencies.

Besides these serious health problems which required hospitalisation we also continued to send all our wards to the OPD of KPC Hospital. As this hospital is very close to our home and all kinds of specialists are available there under one roof at a very nominal rate it is the ideal solution for all our health related problems.

(v) Sports and related Activities – Apart from the benefits sport had for our children, such as physical fitness, improved self-esteem and confidence as well as improved social skills it has also proven to be beneficial to get admission to a school or for finding a job and even an opportunity as a profession or career choice. Growing up with sports can therefore come as an advantage to compete in today's working environment and we can see that clearly in ASKMSC were all our children grew up with a multitude of sports.

In the past year two more of our boys were sponsored by Himali Boarding school who likes to take boys from our home as they win trophies and cups for the school. A total of six of our boys worked for the French international retailer Decathlon Sports as interns, part-timers, full-timers and in their dual training and education programme. One of them got a chance in the fitness company Cult Fit, two made the D-license by the Indian Football Association to become professional coaches and one even started a course to become a Yoga instructor. Not to forget that two are soon to complete their bachelor degrees in Sports Management.

This is of course a good reason to carry on with sports activities in our home even though the dwindling number of children limits that to a certain degree now. Still we organised an inter-home sports event of two days during the winter holidays jointly with the home of PBKOJP with many different sports. This year we won all the trophies and prizes to the dismay of the PBKOJP boys.

There were also a few friendly matches of our team 'FC Kolkata' again and the football tournament on 19th November and it is still football that makes former boys and current inmates meet almost every day for a match.

(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music – In recent years traditional leisure activities such as reading a book from our well stocked library, drawing or watching a movie or football match together has been more and more pushed back by video games played on the mobile phones of our young adults who come for visit. Of the video games played by them the all time favourite is

once again football and they can spend hours to play it. But this cannot stop them from playing real football on the field when ever there is a chance and it is still a daily highlight amongst staff and children alike to play 'Ludo' or 'Uno' in the evening and since music is very close to the heart of our children it is almost always played either in the background or listened to with earphones. Apart from listening to music there is also still a very eager interest in playing musical instruments especially the guitar. And therefore they often spend time together to teach one another the latest tunes. To find the required chords, lyrics, tutorials and/or other information they also search the Internet on our office computer at times or do some programming and other projects in our computer room. Some of the boys also like to cook or bake cakes and cookies or are passionate about gardening in their free time.

(vii) Birthday – Our annual function on 19th November simply called "Our Birthday" by all our children and young adults has even increased in importance for everyone since more and more young adults have moved out and live sometimes in far away places. It therefore has more become like an annual family get-together were everyone happily tries to catch up on what the others have been doing. So they came from near and far decorated the house and organised the entire programme for the day by themselves and after a long time the stage was set up in our courtyard again so that more guests could be invited.

But of course the day started with the usual football tournament in the morning and by popular request went on with a treasure hunt before lunch. The afternoon was spent with many games, such as hit the wicket, balloon fight, goal wall, road race amongst others and was followed by a quiz competition before the entertainment programme for the guests started with the cake cutting ceremony. And while tea and cake was served to the guests two hours of singing, dancing, recitations, theatre performance and speeches could be enjoyed by them. The day ended with a delicious dinner.

(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 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 – For many years we used to go twice in a year on a trip,

one to the mountains and one to the sea beach, but for various reasons we had not gone for an excursion in years now and therefore we had decided on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of our society to make excursions a priority again in the future. And so we ventured out on two very special journeys last year.

The first one was a tour of 15 days to Hampi in Karnataka with 9 of our young adults where we did some exciting camping near the monuments. On the way we visited Visakhapatnam where we pitched our tents on the beach and explored the area by bicycle and also Hyderabad where one of our former children now lives and works. On a second trip a smaller group went as far as Kerala on the invitation of our Swiss football coach Mr. Gobeli and his wife who celebrated their sixtieth birthday there. Further to these excursions we also held our annual picnic again in winter together with the boys of PBKOJP Boy's Home.

(x) Volunteers – As it is said that volunteering has positive benefits for the volunteer as well as for the person or community served it has always been an integral part of our project where volunteers have worked in many different areas in the past. Various aspects of running our home for former street children, such as tuitions and courses in arts, sports, music, organising, housekeeping, administration and many more were actively supported or even entirely managed by voluntary workers from India and abroad in the past. Many of them have come over the years and have helped on a regular basis. Like all those years this year too we got foreign as well as local volunteers who were kind enough to sacrifice their free time and/or holidays to help and support us in fields, such as the ongoing repair and renovation work, the football project, office work, but also cooking, gardening, tuition, practical skills and many more. We would like to thank them all, particularly those who have been doing this for many years.

(xi) Aftercare Unit – Our Aftercare Unit in Picnic Garden continues to be an autonomous unit with a changing number of roommates. While we go on to provide them with groceries, rice and cooking gas and of course support and life guidance from our main branch in Santoshpur as and when required it is solely run by the youths who stays there. They arrange their daily chores on their own and the senior ones guide the younger ones, so that they learn to organise their lives while looking for jobs or college. In fact they all feel so comfortable there that it can become a problem to convince them to move out when they have found a stable and well-paying job to make room for the newcomers. That said our Aftercare Unit is a very important and helpful step for the transition to an independent life for our young adults.

3. Finances

Roughly 90% of all funds of our society in the past financial year were provided once again by our sister charity and partner in Germany the

“Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.”, while almost 10% have been contributed again by the organisation H.E.L.G.O. e.V. in Hamburg. All in all we saw a drop of about 3 lakhs in revenue required for the year despite the ongoing repair and renovation work. This is due to the ever smaller number of children in expensive schools while more and more young adults stand on their own feet, thus no longer needing financial support from us. We therefore did not face any financial bottlenecks throughout the year and with the repair work expected to come to an end in the coming year and the number of children and young adults supported by us further going to drop we do not foresee any danger of budgetary problems in the near future.

Apart from the foreign contributions there have also been some local donations again and the annual membership fees of our members, but local support is otherwise mainly in the form of sponsored meals or donations of clothes which have significantly increased because more and more people in the wider neighbourhood read about us on the Internet.

4. Outlook

At the end of the coming year the total number of children in our home in Santoshpur will come close to zero, as practically everyone will be 18 or above by March'20. By then all renovation work in the home should also have come to an end. The stage would be set for a new beginning with a new generation of destitute children. It will therefore be important to find a solution within that year for the future of our property as well as our NGO while at the same time we need to stay focused on getting the rest of our young adults established in life.