

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2019-20

1. Introduction

In the financial year 2019-20 the *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) continued with the effort to extend help and guidance to our wards to earn their livelihood and to find their right place in the society. With our encouragement and support more of our young adults left the safety and comfort of our Aftercare Unit and dared to live an independent life. Also for the first time one of our wards left college with a bachelor degree and only a few boys are now still left in school. This also means that we have now only a small number of minors left in our home. Unfortunately the year ended with an unexpected thread to all the progress already made when the Corona virus and the subsequent lockdown all in a sudden presented us and our wards with a totally new challenge not only related to health.

2. Activities

(i) General – For the second year in a row the Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children supported a total number of 24 children and young adults financially, but since not everyone needed full support the total expenditure for the year 2019-20 came further down in comparison to the previous year. Further to the 24 children and young adults who received financial support of any kind an even higher number received life guidance, help and advice from us when ever desired by them.

In the past year only eleven of our wards still went to various schools, boards and classes. For one of these eleven we had managed to get a scholarship by Himali Boarding School, Kurseong again and so he went to join his two brothers in the hills to complete his higher secondary education there. The rest went to college, received training, did a foreign language course or prepared for studies abroad. In October'19 already the second ward of ASKMSC went for further education to Germany. Also last year for the first time ever someone from ASKMSC graduated with a bachelor degree from college and more are going to follow soon. This makes us very proud and underlines the success of our work over all those years.

Apart from education in the past sport in general and particular football has always been an important part of our society, but with only a few wards left in our home activities were more and more limited to spontaneous matches or fitness sessions and even though leisure time increased most of the activities are now online especially with the onset of the lockdown at the end of the year.

A few highlights of the year were once again our annual function or 'Birthday', which was a big event again this year and many invited guests

saw an excellent entertainment program organised by all the wards of ASKMSC and also the annual picnic jointly organised with PBKOJB Boy's Home. Unfortunately we were not able to organise another excursion this year due to uncontrollable circumstances.

While we had a lot of medical problems in the previous two years the past year was thankfully less eventful again in this regard. Other problems ranged from the long standing license issue with the Directorate of Social Welfare to the sudden lockdown in late March which resulted in our former wards losing their jobs and suddenly threatened to jeopardize the college and school education of the others apart from the thread to health and life.

Also throughout the past year renovation and refurbishing work continued with the main focus on the five years older one of the two buildings on our compound. There some electric wiring was renewed and automatic circuit breakers installed. After some plumbing work in all bathrooms, the toilets and the sickbay tiles were laid and new washbasins fixed. The fibre sheet roof on the terrace of the building was completely renewed and a new store room was constructed behind the building. Also the office and the computer room housed in that building got a complete facelift. Like in the previous year we continued to involve some of our young adults as much as possible in this repair work in order to give them a chance to earn some money to support themselves while in college. Also volunteers helped again with the different repair work and some of our wards enjoyed doing some gardening work and looked after our pets.

In another development some seniors of our young adults moved out from our Aftercare Unit in Picnic Garden last year to start a life on their own. A new generation of 18 year old boys moved in instead, which marked the beginning of a new cycle of young adults learning gradually how to organise their lives on their own.

The year 2019-20 also saw the visit of quite a few foreign delegations, volunteers and well-wishers again. This includes Mr. Bernhard Pfister and Mr. Matthias Knoche the President and Vice-President of our German partner association "*Aktion Lebenshilfe fur Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.*". We thank all of them for their help and support. Last but not the least we would like to say good bye to one of our oldest employees, Ms. Sandhya Dey. After serving ASKMSC for more than 15 years she retired w.e.f December'19. She was loved by the children and respected by all of us. We would like to thank her for all the help and contribution to our goal to help destitute children and wish her all the best for her new life.

(ii) Problems faced by us – In the past financial year there was some sort of a development regarding the long standing license issue of many years with the Directorate of Social Welfare. Until the year 2008 the DSW had renewed our license to run a home for former street children every year. Ever since that year they simply ignored all our annual applications for renewal. We therefore hoped that we could finally get our annual

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application for renewal processed again by them when we received an email on 11.06.19 from a gmail address with the subject: 'Regarding issuance and renewal of license' and the text 'Find the enclosure herewith.'. Two files were attached one being a letter dated 29.05.19 to 'The Secretary NGOs of Kolkata (All)' signed by the Director of Social Welfare and the second being a copy of 'The Women and Children's Institutions (Licensing) Act, 1956'. The letter read: 'Please find enclosed herewith documents/forms related to issue/renewal of licence of Women's & Children's Homes. May also find these documents in the website of Deptt. of Women & Child Development & Social Welfare in connection with issue/renewal of licence for running Women's & Children's Homes under WCIL Rules, 1958'. We interpreted this email and letter as a hint to use the form provided in this email and no more the one we had been using all those years during our annual applications for the renewal. We therefore decided to use the provided form during our next application for renewal at the end of March'20 hoping it would make a difference. Unfortunately due to the lockdown we were no more able to submit our annual application and are now discussing whether extension of license is actually still required even though there will be no more minor child under ASKMSC soon. It should probably be more appropriate now to apply for a completely new license instead once we are ready to admit any new children.

A new problem we have noticed in the past years makes us more and more aware about the impact of climate change and the costs thereof. While it used to be only every eight to ten years that a severe cyclone found its way to Kolkata it seems to be now twice in every year, one before monsoon begins and one shortly after the rainy season! This not only means a lot of extra work every year to protect our home, but also begins to hurt us financially due to unavoidable damage these cyclones cause to our compound. Unfortunately more and more such calamities must be expected in the future, which will only increase such costs.

More and more of our boys have completed school by now and it has always been a challenge after leaving school to find the right course, training or job to fit best the individual skills, interests and talents of each one of them. This year a few of them decided to find a job instead of joining a college after getting their higher secondary results, but most of them have enrolled at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) for different subjects. As we have had problems before with students enrolled with IGNOU we appointed a senior student to guide the others and make them aware of the procedures as well as deadlines, etc. Unfortunately it has to be said that this did not improve the situation much either and they continued to have massive problems fulfilling the assignments and study requirements and meeting deadlines and one of them already gave up after one semester and joined George College instead.

After a long gap we also had problems again with our boys who are still in

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school. Four boys failed their board exams in one or two subjects and had to go for re-examination. Also two boys were suspended in December'19 for misbehaviour and were sent back home from boarding school. After our intervention they could only join again at the end of January'20.

At the end of the previous year we had once again faced the problem that senior wards had difficulties to leave the care and protection of our Aftercare Unit to make space for the younger once even though they had the means to move out and start to live an independent live. After a constructive meeting with them and some encouragement those who could afford it eventually did move out at the beginning of the year, but unfortunately found themselves in trouble again when the year ended. But this was not their fault, because in March'20 a totally new and unknown situation demanded an immediate reaction from all of us. With the spread of the Corona virus in India and the sudden lockdown ordered by the government almost all our former wards needed our urgent help again, even though some of them had long left our care and had been able to survive by their own means. Some of them had even started their own families with children, but with the beginning of the lockdown they lost their income, 'No Work No Pay'! Even worse some of them lost their job altogether and unable to pay their rent any longer and without major savings they were dependent on charity again. With the announcement of the lockdown we therefore did not hesitate a second to offer anyone of them who needed accommodation and support to stay in our Santoshpur home. Even the youth from our Aftercare Unit we asked to move in, as we would not have been able to support them during the strict restrictions. Altogether 28 children, young adults and staff stayed therefore in our home just after the lockdown began. This way it was much easier to feed them, but some of them could not make it in time and were stuck in various places in and around Kolkata or even as far as Mumbai, Bangaluru, Hyderabad and Lucknow. It became fast clear to us that we would have to set aside funds for some of them to survive while we tried to help them return to Kolkata for safety. A total of 11 young adults were stuck and needed immediate advice or financial help. We are currently trying our level best to help them in any possible way.

(iii) Education – In the past financial year a total of 11 children and young adults went to school with some or full support of ASKMSC. Three of them were trying to complete their senior secondary from the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), three studied in Himali Boarding School in Kurseong, four in Pearl Rosary School in Serampore and one in Nimpith Ramkrishna Vidyabhavan, Nimpith. In detail they attended the following schools and classes:

Pearl Rosary School

Class XI

Raja Das, Ravi Yadav

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Class X	Biswanath Maity, Sahid Naskar
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Himali Boarding School, Kurseong

Class XII	Biswajit Sarder, Tapas Ghosh
Class XI	Somnath Maity

Nimpith Ramkrishna Vidyabhavan

Class VII	Sukhdev Naskar
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National Institute of Open Schooling

Class XII	Chandan Das, Abul Sheikh, Raju Chakraborty
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Nine more boys of ASKMSC got the results of their higher secondary exams in May'19. Only four of them had passed, but two who had failed in one subject could take a re-examination in the month of July'19, which they eventually cleared. Another three who follow the NIOS system still had to sit for exams in October'19 and then again in March'20 to clear all their subjects.

Also five boys of ASKMSC got the results of their class X board exams at the end of May'19 and three of them had passed. One of them got a chance in Himali Boarding School, Kurseong which agreed to sponsor him for his higher secondary education. Two unfortunately had to repeat class X.

It was encouraging that last year for the first time ever someone from ASKMSC graduated with a bachelor degree when one of our young adults completed his Bachelor of Sports Management. All in all a total of 13 young adults who once grew up in our home in Santoshpur were enrolled in a college or university last year for different subjects, but the degree of financial support from us varied. Some of them no longer needed our help and others managed to pay the cost of living themselves while we took over the college fees. But the majority of them still had to be supported in full.

Only one of the two young adults who had attended the D-License course for football coaches offered by AIFF in March'19 had passed when results came out in May'19, but both of them got a good job with a Brazilian company in Lucknow in July'19 where they coach now in various schools. Further to this two of our young adults had taken foreign language courses with the French cultural institute Alliance Française du Bengal and the German cultural institute at Max Muller Bhavan in the past years. While one of the two who had learned French had already secured a good job in a French call centre of Wipro Limited at the end of the previous year another one of our young adults went to Germany for further education in October'19 after completing the C1 language course in German. This

sparked a run on foreign language courses by our wards and some of them enrolled for Spanish and Japanese at the Ramakrishna Mission last year. Sadly everything has come to a halt at the end of this financial year when the lockdown started. Schools and colleges do not know when they will be able to open again. Board exams that had started in February or March could not be completed and that also affected five of our wards who had been sitting for their class XII board exams and unfortunately now do not know when it will be possible to finish them.

(iv) Medical – After having encountered many medical problems in the previous two years that really kept us on our toes the past year was finally calmer again in comparison. There was the cruciate ligament rupture of the previous year that could eventually be successfully operated in April'19 after the swell had come down substantially and after some physiotherapy sessions the boy can now play football again. In another case a cholesteatoma in the right ear required an operation in July'19, which was also successful. Both operations were done in the nearby KPC Hospital. Apart from that there were only minor health problems, such as fever, ankle pain or skin infections that could be treated in the 'Out Patient Department' of the same hospital, since it is very close to our home and many specialists are available there under one roof. This hospital charges only nominal rates and is also included in the cashless list of the health insurance company where all our wards and staff are insured under our comprehensive 'Health Care Plan'. It therefore is the ideal solution for all our health related problems.

(v) Sports and related Activities – With only a few wards left in our home regular sports have slowly come to a halt. Activities were more and more limited to spontaneous badminton games, fitness sessions in our courtyard or football matches on the nearby field. With the onset of the Corona virus crises at the end of the year contact sports such as football had to be stopped all together and only fitness training and yoga in the courtyard or the rooms remained feasible with a minimum distance of 2m between the participants.

Just before the lockdown at the beginning of March'20 FIFA licensed Swiss Youth Coach Mr. Christoph Gobeli of the Swiss Super League Champion 'Young Boys Bern' managed to give another training session again. One of our own former wards who holds a 'D License' in football coaching from the All India Football Federation by now also gave occasional training sessions for our boys in the home as well as for our young adults from the Aftercare Unit. And yet another one of our boys was sponsored by Himali Boarding school after he was recommended and praised by us as the excellent football player he is. He went on to represent the school in various tournaments after his admission.

(vi) Leisure, Arts & Music – Waiting for marks to be published after

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board exams, a gap between school and college or simply the time till one finds a job leisure time has increased a lot for our wards these days and with the start of the lockdown at the end of the financial year it seems to have become endless. Apart from spending time gossiping among themselves or listening to music everyone has developed his own favourite pastime. Some like to look after our pets, some try to refine the art of baking cakes and cookies utilising our backing oven, some do gardening or help with repair work, everyone likes to play football, one composes his own music and uploads it to his 'Youtube' channel, another one spends time Java programming, a few still read books from our library and even drawing and painting became popular again during lockdown. Also preparing an entertainment program for our annual 'Birthday' kept everyone busy for many weeks. We also still watched some movies or football matches together, but the most popular pastime throughout the year was playing online games. Even Ludo was played online and became very popular with the start of the lockdown, as it helped to keep distance from one another.

(vii) Birthday – The absolute highlight of every year is the annual function, which is intended to commemorate the day the first ten children moved into our home on 19 November 2000. This day fondly called 'Birthday' by everyone already returned for the 19th time on 19 November 2019 and was celebrated in style. Our young adults took once again full responsibility for the organisation of the party and were busy already weeks in advance with the detailed planning. Even the decoration items were handmade by them for the occasion and with lots of enthusiasm and feverish anticipation they decorated the entire house and the courtyard on the night before the great day. Each of the youngsters played a wonderful part in it and each one gave a special hand to bring out the best of his capability to garland the very establishment or as one of them put it: 'The eve of the birthday brings all our excitement to the roof', yes and then the day finally had come!

Everything went according to plan, football tournament in the morning, lunch and games in the afternoon, entertainment with lots of guests in the evening and a delicious dinner that rounded up a perfect day. Thank you so much to all of those who made this possible! You really did a great job!

(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. And even though our weekly food and meal routine of many years is time tested and nutritious our cook has been able to add extra flavour to it by getting new ideas from 'Youtube'.

(ix) Excursions – Despite the fact that we had resolved to intensify our efforts again to go on excursions and some really good outings in the previous year that encouraged us in this resolve it was simply not meant to be this year. A planned one week trekking tour to the Sandakphu Peak in the Singalila National Park, Darjeeling District in April'19 had to be cancelled due to the national elections which were scheduled at the same time and are prone to violence particularly in Darjeeling District. It was then decided to do the trek instead in April'20 which turned out to be also not possible because of the Corona situation and the lockdown. For this reason our annual picnic in January'20 turned out to be once more the only outing of the year. It took place again in the countryside near Jaynagar, South-24-Parganas and was organised jointly with the boys of PBKOJB Boy's Home. With many former wards also taking part in the picnic it was a day filled with fun, games and most important for a picnic delicious food!

(x) Volunteers – The main volunteers of the past financial year were our former wards themselves. Many of them helped where ever they could to give something back to the institution that helped them to grow up and survive. This shows once again that ASKMSC is more like a big family rather than just an institution.

Whether it was organising of our annual function on 19th November or beautification and renovation work, gardening, fitness courses or administrative work someone always had time and motivation to extend a helping hand and they were often supported by local as well as foreign volunteers who were kind enough to sacrifice their free time and holidays to serve our project without remuneration. Some of them come regularly to help at a particular time of the year while others even give their support throughout the year. Once again we would like to thank them all, particularly those who have been doing this for many years!

(xi) Aftercare Unit – At the beginning of the past financial year a new generation of young adults moved into our Aftercare Unit in Picnic Garden while many older once moved out and started to live on their own. This implied that we took over the full payment of the flat rent again a responsibility the previous generation had taken over step by step in the past as and when they had been financially capable to do so. This marked the beginning of a new cycle of young adults learning gradually how to organise their lives on their own. We provide them with groceries, rice and cooking gas from our main branch in Santoshpur, but this being an autonomous unit it is solely run by the youths who stay there. Besides

looking for jobs or the right college they also organise their daily household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, etc. themselves and only contact us for advice and life guidance or when problems occur. This successful transition from one generation to another one proved once again what an important and helpful step our Aftercare Unit is for our young adults to learn how to live an independent life.

3. Finances

Due to the further diminishing number of children in school and fewer children and young adults overall needing our full financial support the total amount required by our society in the past year was only about 83% of the amount needed in the year before, even though repair and renovation work was still going on throughout the year and costs thereof were about 50% higher than in the previous year.

Part of this annual budget was once again covered by a one time contribution from the German organisation H.E.L.G.O. e.V. who have been supporting us on and off in the past and were kind enough to provide us with the same amount like in the previous year. But this year too, the major part of our budget was borne by our German partner association "*Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.*", though the contribution was smaller than in the previous year due to the shrinking budget requirements. Added to this were the annual membership fees of our members, but local contributions were limited to sponsored meals and donations of clothes from people in the near and wider neighbourhood who got to know about us from the Internet.

It was anticipated that the annual budget required for the coming year would decrease even further, but with the Corona virus crises that has began to unfold it cannot be said at the moment what effect this will have on the coming annual budget.

4. Outlook

With only six minors left in our home in Santoshpur of whom four will be 18 next month and the remaining two soon after, we were actually expecting to start with a new generation of destitute children in the new financial year 2020-21, but with the emerging Corona crises it is now difficult to say how the coming year will pan out. Unfortunately it seems to be already predictable that many more children will need our help in the future due to the hardship and the job loses the pandemic is causing. We therefore will try everything possible in the coming year to finally sort out the license issue with the Directorate of Social Welfare so that at least from this side nothing stands in the way of a new beginning.

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