

Annual Report on the work of the
Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children
for the year 2021-22

Introduction

The *Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children* (ASKMSC) was founded in the year 1998 and registered the same year under the West Bengal Society Registration Act, 1961. It is a small NGO, which is a fully non-commercial, non-profit and non-religious organisation committed to the welfare of street children in Kolkata, offering food, shelter and education to them. On 19th November 2000 we opened a home for these children in Santoshpur, starting with ten little boys aged 3 to 5 years of age. From then on till the year 2006 a total of 41 little boys were admitted to this home and grew up there under our care and guidance. They were mainly boys from Sealdah Station without any known family and the youngest of them was only 4 month old on admission. We provided the children with a proper shelter they could call their home, healthy and nutritious food, clothing and accessories according to their needs and a high standard of education along with many activities, such as music, arts and sports. Later on an 'Aftercare Unit' was opened in Picnic Garden for those who had turned 18. While many of them have managed to live an independent life by now quite a few are still in college further depending on our support. The last 3 years we have therefore been focused on providing our young adults with aftercare services, corona relief and guidance when ever needed. Also a few who had not completed school yet needed our special care to help them pass their higher secondary education in their respective schools under pandemic conditions

2. Activities

(i) General – For the second year in a row the Ali S. K. Memorial Society for the Children had to help out some of our former wards, besides those who were still in school or college. Like in the previous year they were in economic distress due to the ongoing corona pandemic. Nevertheless this past year the total number of young adults supported by us came down to 19 in comparison to 24 during the two years before. Still the total expenditure in the past financial year was slightly higher than in the previous year due to a steep increase in inflation and the acquisition of some new assets. Another major part of the annual costs was the college fees and they increased further with three more admissions in the past year. All in all there were eleven of our wards in college last year, while only three of our wards still went to school. In July'21 another one of our wards went to study abroad. While two had gone to Germany for their higher studies this one went to USA. It is important to mention here that all of the three young man found means to finance their studies abroad independent from ASKMSC.

Our Aftercare Unit in Picnic Garden was once again closed for a big part of the year during the lockdown when everyone stayed in our home in Santoshpur instead. And with Delta and Omicron corona waves keeping us indoors almost throughout the year our wards were hard hit missing their usual leisure activities such as football or meeting friends. Fortunately we were at least able to celebrate our annual function or 'Birthday' in style again, which was the only highlight of the year. In contrast to this there were several Covid-19 cases amongst our wards and staff over the past 12 months, which put us under quarantine and had us rather worried. Here it came as some relief that wards and staff could finally get vaccinated by the middle of the year.

Despite the many interruptions due to the pandemic we were finally able to submit an application with the Directorate of Social Welfare for a new license to run our home with new children, even though somewhat delayed due to the long lockdown. But we had utilised the time to beautify the home, give a last finishing touch to the rooms, do some last minor repairs



Children's Room



Staff Room with Library

and to purchase some hardware and equipment required for a new start in the future, such as washing machine, fans, lighting, computers and laptops, etc. We had decided that after helping 41 boys we would this time try to help about the same number of girls. We are now awaiting the statutory inspection within the coming year.

(ii) Problems faced by us – This year sadly it was once again the pandemic which determined almost all of our work and efforts and weighed us down the most. Again it was months long "Shelter in Place" for all of us, no new jobs for those who had lost them and a total breakdown of the education sector for those still in school or college. And with that came the problem of once again having to organise a corona safe stay of our wards in our home in Santoshpur, the problem of logistics for the daily food supply during the lockdown, the psychological problems of being locked up and the total loss of drive to study as well as the loss of hope for the future. Some of these problems were already known from the previous year, but this time they were aggravated by the fact that after a short period of apparent normality it now felt like they kept repeating

themselves with no end in sight. To add to this feeling nature had yet another cyclone in stock for us! Just like cyclone Amphan in May'20, it was cyclone Yaas that forced us in May'21 to fortify our property for the impact of a cyclone again. But luckily there was no damage this time.

And it wasn't just nature that kept us on our toes in what was already a very difficult year due to the pandemic. The government too had burdened us with additional work. The renewal of our registration under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act had to be applied for in April'21. Also all NGOs had to re-register themselves under section 12A of the Income Tax Act. This was first to be applied for provisionally and once that was granted another application had to be submitted within 6 months for a full re-registration. The same procedure under section 80G of the Income Tax Act and to make matters worse the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) had decided to close down the old Income Tax Portal in June'21 and instead launched a completely new portal after a downtime of about one week. Unfortunately with the sudden launch of this new portal all hell broke loose, because absolutely nothing seemed to work anymore the way it used to do. All data of previous years seemed to have disappeared, necessary online forms did not function the way they were supposed to do and deadlines had to be postponed again and again by the government for this reason. To add to the whole chaos all hotlines were completely jammed and if you did get someone on the phone they could not help at all and instead asked you for patience. It therefore took until December'21 until our auditor could finally upload form 10B, which was necessary for our income tax return and so we could not submit our returns until January'22. And it goes without saying that all other afore mentioned applications were hampered, delayed and complicated by this portal problem, too.

(iii) Education – With only three of our wards still in school the majority of them were enrolled in various colleges and courses this year. Three more wards have been admitted newly to college for a Bachelor's degree in their chosen field while eight of our wards attended their second year in college. In detail they attended the following colleges and schools:

Pearl Rosary School

Class XII	Biswanath Maity, Sahid Naskar
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Nimpith Ramkrishna Vidyabhavan

Class IX	Sukhdev Naskar
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George College, Sealdah

BBA	Biswajit Sarder, Raquib Purkait, Raja Ratha
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BSM	Abul Shaikh, Tapas Ghosh
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iLEAD College, Sealdah

BID	Sourav Dey
BSC	Somnath Maity

Indira Gandhi National Open University IGNOU

BTS	Manoj Biswas
BCOMG	Bubai Yadav
BSWG	Chandan Das
BAG	Raja Das

Another three of our wards have got awarded higher secondary pass certificates last year and while two of our wards were already studying abroad in Germany another one left to join a college in the USA in July'21.

For those of our wards who attended school or college in Kolkata last year it was yet another year without in-classroom teaching. As already feared at the end of the previous financial year schools and colleges had to be closed again soon after the new academic year had started due the rising numbers of Covid-19 cases and what we had termed last year 'The Great Educational Depression' seemed to more and more turn into 'The Total Educational Collapse' during this year. With them having only a few hours of online classes per week along with some assignments we tried our level best to keep our wards engaged with their studies as most of them were losing interest and eagerness when another lockdown was announced. We also provided them with fast fibre optic internet and new computers and



Computer Room

laptops for extra support, but when it became clear that most students would not have to give exams and would be promoted to the next grade based on their assignment marks it became next to impossible to keep their motivation up despite the fact that at least some of the institutions held

occasional online exams. Almost a full academic year went by like this and only at the end of the financial year things started to normalise again, which meant that after almost two years in college some of our wards saw the inside of a lecture hall in college for more or less the first time. Contrary to the year before when they happily returned to classes after lockdown now they did not take presence in class all to serious anymore

as they were used to stay at home and therefore class attendance was very poor. Another sign that motivation for studies was at an all time low was the fact that before the pandemic foreign language courses were very much in vogue amongst our wards while now nobody made an effort to continue with his language course. By the end of the year also two of our wards had to sit for their class XII board exams after two years of high school with practically no in-classroom teaching. It remains to be seen how they will fare in the same with results to be expected by May or June'22.

(iv) Medical – For yet another year the pandemic dominated many aspects of our lives and in May '21 almost all of our wards were once again sheltered in our home during another major lockdown. This time the dangerous Delta variant dominated across the country and claimed many lives. Unfortunately one of our boys fell ill with Covid-19 during that time and was immediately isolated by us in our sickbay. Due to the really very serious situation in India we had put in place even stricter corona measures in our home than in the previous year, which might have prevented a further spread and fortunately there were no further cases in the house and the young man recovered from his symptoms after a short while. After we were fortunately spared worse problems with the Delta wave, we were eagerly waiting to get everyone vaccinated as soon as possible. In January'21 the government had started its vaccination drive against the dreaded disease, but only from 1st of May'21 everyone above the age of 18 was eligible to get vaccinated against Covid-19 and due to the initial rush we could get our staff and all our wards only vaccinated with the first dose by the end of June'22, while the second one was given three months later.



Sickbay

Then in January'22 when the apparently less dangerous but super-contagious Omega variant swept through Kolkata like a wildfire several people fell ill at once in our home some of them for the second time. Even instant isolation could not stop further spread, but maybe because almost everyone had had Covid before and was fully vaccinated now the outbreak subsided fast sparing many and without anyone getting seriously sick. After this we did not detect any further infections with the virus till the end of the financial year.

Like in the previous year non-covid related health problems once again remained low throughout the year and visits to the doctor's chamber were limited to skin problems or the common cold. Hence medical expenses remained below pre-pandemic levels.

(v) Sports, Leisure, Arts & Music – As the Delta wave raged in the entire country and yet another lockdown was announced in response, virtually everything came to a sudden halt again and this time all of our wards' offline activities seemed to have come to a permanent end as well. With online classes, online exams, online games, etc., practically everything had shifted to the virtual world and not much changed back even after the lockdown had finally come to an end. Since there were no minors left in our home and our last batch of young adults had moved to our Aftercare Unit after the end of the lockdown our home and our courtyard fell silent for almost the entire rest of the year with the exception of a few weeks in November'22 when preparations and rehearsals for the entertainment program of our annual 'Birthday' kept everyone busy for a few weeks.

(vi) Birthday – The anniversary of the day when the first ten street children had found a home in our organisation for the first time in their lives has been celebrated by us as the 'Birthday' of all our children ever since. Sadly in the previous year for the first time we were able to celebrate this day, the 19th November, only within the 'family' and without any guests due to the pandemic. But since everyone was going through such a tough time in their lives we were all very eager to celebrate this day in style again. After long considerations and evaluation of the situation we eventually decided to organize a big party again, but all the guests invited had to prove that they were fully vaccinated and had to strictly follow the corona protocol in place. Instantly everybody was super motivated to organise this event to make it an absolute memorable day. That is why this year our boys were all up the night before the special day decorating the house, rehearsing their acting or singing performance and whatever they had planned to entertain the guests. All were too excited to go to sleep, gossiping and listening to music while they completed each task with enthusiasm. It was the perfect time to mend broken relationships and to wipe away all the negativity that had accumulated in their minds.

According to years of tradition the next morning started with a football tournament, followed by treasure hunt and games that our boys had invented themselves interrupted only by an exquisite lunch. And when the evening came and the guests began to arrive the entire house was glittering due to



Birthday

colorful decorations and shining bright lights while people were laughing and enjoying each other's company. A quiz competition was organised in front of the crowd and finally the long rehearsed program of music, dance and song entertained the many guests. Once the show was over everyone had a delicious dinner prepared by our cooks who were praised for their hard work. The special day ended quite late as even when all the guests had left our wards were still discussing every single moment they had experienced on *their* 'Birthday'.

It can therefore be said with confidence that this day was a full and complete success, because everyone was able to enjoy a few hours again after such a long and hard time. Fortunately our corona measures also seemed to have been successful, because nobody seemed to have contracted the dreaded virus.

(vii) Meals – In defiance of the pandemic situation and the lockdowns that came with it we were once again determined in the past year to follow our



Kitchen

time-tested diet chart according to which we serve three times 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 banana for breakfast. Every day fruits are given during the afternoon break while there is another main rice meal with curries for dinner. At times the cooks also try out new recipes from 'YouTube', baking cakes are a part of it.



Canteen

(viii) Excursions – For the second year in a row outdoor activities were severely affected due to the pandemic and to avoid any kind of risk once again there was no annual excursion at all. Also the picnic in winter had to be canceled again for the same reason. It is very much hoped that things will change for the better in the coming year and excursions will be possible again.

(ix) Volunteers – Despite the difficulties and the hardship foreign travel meant during the pandemic we received help from one foreign volunteer again in the past year. Ms. Erna Mehling Krebs arrived from Germany at the end of October'21 and stayed with us for four weeks. She helped us with the preparations for our 'Birthday' party on 19th November and also offered her support for some smaller repair work here and there. Apart from that we received support again from some of our wards who together with our in-house staff helped to complete the small renovation and beautification work that was there to get the home ready for a new batch of children in need. Great thanks to all of them!



Dormitory

(x) Aftercare Unit – Our young adults in the Aftercare Unit had to move into our home in Santoshpur again at the beginning of the passed financial year due to the announcement of another lockdown. For the second time they had to stay there for some months until the lockdown was lifted. Finally they could shifted back and we provide them again with groceries, rice and cooking gas, as well as free advice and guidance whenever asked for and they took care of their own cooking and household management again. With most of them enrolled in colleges with classes being held online and internet facilities in the Aftercare Unit poor many of them continued to spend a lot of time in our home throughout the year to utilise the computers in our newly refurbished Computer Room or just to use our free wifi service on their mobiles during their visits.

3. Finances

At the start of the financial year 2021-22 the renewal of our license under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 was due and we duly submitted our application for the same by the end of April'22. Since our work is practically 100% dependent on foreign donations, we were very anxious as to whether the renewal would be granted or not. This tension increased as many other NGOs had their licenses revoked or not renewed over the course of the year. Fortunately our license was successfully renewed in December'22 after an inspection of our home by an official of the MHA in October'22. This was vital for the survival of our organisation and allowed us to continue with our work.

Particularly during the second pandemic year it was more important than ever to have a stable and reliable financial support and this year too the main part of our annual budget was provided by our longstanding German partners the “Aktion Lebenshilfe für Indiens Strassenkinder e. V.”. The

remaining part was once again covered by a contribution from the German organization H.E.L.G.O. e.V. Added to this were the annual membership fees of our members and a small amount of local contributions.

4. Outlook

A milestone was reached when the last of our wards turned 18 in March'21 and shifted to our Aftercare Unit. It was then that we had hoped to be able to start with new children in our home in Santoshpur, but not without a new license from the Directorate of Social Welfare. Due to the pandemic things got very much delayed, but a license for girls could finally be applied for with the DSW and the home is now ready to re-open as a home for destitute girl children. A response from the DSW is awaited eagerly in the coming year and it is our deep wish that we can help approx. 40 girls to have a better future as soon as the license is granted.