

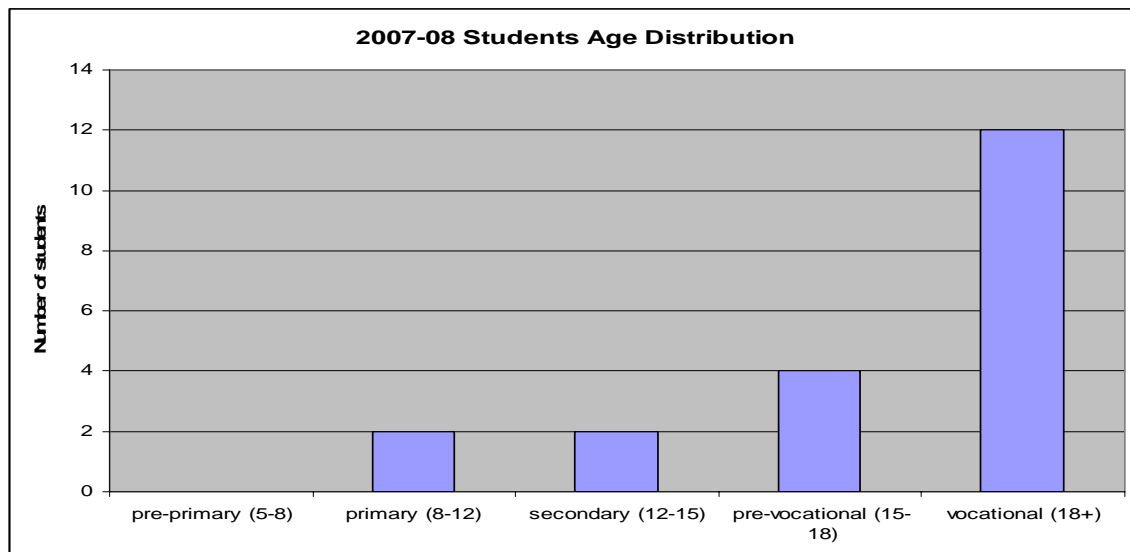
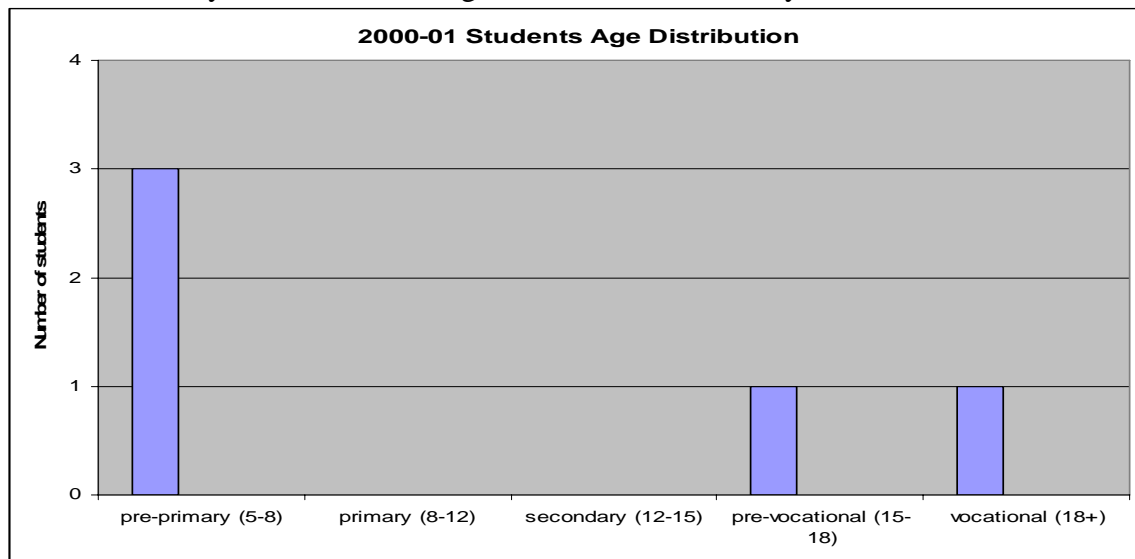
Answers to questions raised by ASHA volunteers during the 11/21/07 meeting

Q: How many kids in the locality are mentally challenged?

A: There are at least 50 students in the neighborhood that are mentally challenged. The way to recruit kids is through word of mouth, through surveys and by visiting both private and Government schools in the neighborhood and talking to the teachers about slow-learning students. (This was suggested during the presentation of Shrishti by Vinod, and it is already in implementation.) Once the mentally challenged kids are identified, meetings are held with their parents to discuss the future of the kid at Pragati.

Q: What is the age distribution of the people in the school?

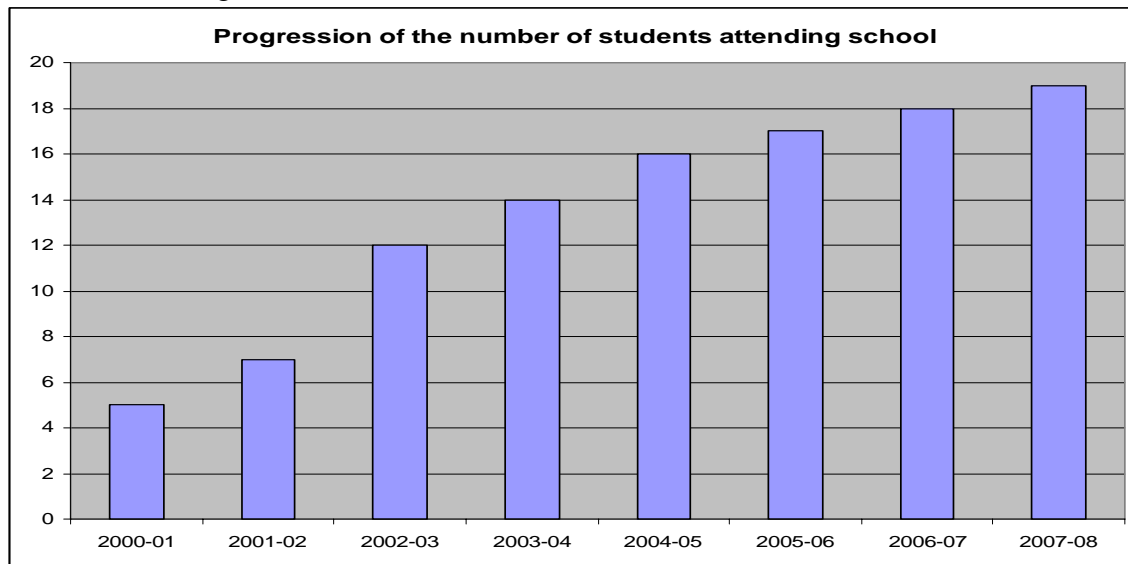
A: The school started in 2000 with strength of 5 students and has grown to accommodate 20 students this year. Below is the age distribution charts for years 2000-01 and 2007-08.



The five students that were there at the beginning stayed with the school all these years and have progressed from their respective classes. One of the students has quit the school this year because of change in residence.

Q: How many new students have been admitted to the school over the past 5 years?

A: The school is limited by resources needed to support more students. Hence the total number of students at the school has kind of plateau'ed even though there is demand for more admissions. During the last few years, new students are admitted when an old student drops-out. Students drop out of school in hope of faster progression at another school or because of change of residence. The graph below indicates the number of students attending the school.



Q: Do the kids who get normal still continue to go to rehab?

A: It is very difficult, if not impossible, for the kids to become completely normal. They always need to be under supervision. The primary reason is that the mentally challenged people do not have the concept of money and do not understand it very well. They will be able to do routine things, as per instructions, but will not be completely independent. So the short answer to the question is that the children continue to be in rehab.

Q: Individual donor contributions were not mentioned in the audit report, why?

A: Since the individual donors up to this point of time did not have specific restrictions on spending, individual contributions were omitted on the audit report. A more thorough audit report will be generated in the future if deemed necessary by generous donor organizations as 'Asha for Education.'

Q: How many special schools are there in the neighborhood? Do they charge money or also offer FREE admission?

A: There are 3 special schools within the distance of 5km. All the schools are NGO schools. They do not charge admission fee officially, but require a donation amount of Rs. 250 p.m. per child.

Q: How does the organization recruit kids? What is the answer to the parents' question: 'what can these kids get out of attending school'?

A: The answer to parents' concern is that the children will be happy among other similar students, and that the children will improve their basic skills and gain in confidence. For instance, Praveen, who works as an assistant and brings children to school, is paid Rs. 100 per month by the respective children's parents as a token of appreciation. And this boosts his confidence. In the 20 students, about 50% of the children have uneducated parents and they are the most difficult to convince. The other 50% of the students are children of Government employees and of middle-class educated parents.

Kids are recruited by word-of-mouth, surveys or by visiting other regular schools around, as explained in the answer to question #1. Lot more students want to join, but the school does not have the resources to admit more students. Many parents are willing to send their students to school if the school had a mode of transportation.

Q: Any other success stories? A number of students have been there for ~8 years, what have they accomplished?

A: There have been many students who have improved over the years. Here are some of their stories:

Rehana: When Rehana first joined school, she could not differentiate colors or numbers, and was weak in her basic academic skills as size concept and words. She was also very weak in basic livelihood skills like using the toilet. After 6 years at the school, during which she has progressed from primary to pre-vocational grade, she has picked up a lot. She has improved on a lot of her skills; she is able to write her own name among other things as being able to perform basic livelihood skills. She has a pre-disposition to vocational and extra-curricular activities.

Bhavana: Bhavana joined the school when she was 5yrs old in pre-primary grade. She has moved from pre-primary to secondary while these 7 years at school. She sings very well.

Praveen: When Praveen joined the school, he was 20 years. He joined in vocational grade, and continues to be in the same grade (highest class). He has made rapid progress and is now employed by the school as an assistant trainer. He travels a distance to come to school from home via public transport. Now, he is able to do routine work, identify bus numbers and follow instructions to travel by bus. He brings 3-4 students to school from their homes everyday.

Five students have remained with the school since its inception and have progressed. Four of them are Bharadwaj (pre-vocational to vocational), Praveen (vocational to employed-part-time), Bhavana & Jyoti (pre-primary to secondary).

Q: How do Praveen and the kids commute between school and residence?

A: Praveen walks the children from their respective homes. He brings only 3-4 children from around the neighborhood. Among other students, there are 2-3 children with

psychomotor disability and in those cases, either the parent walks the child to the school or carries the child to school.

Q: How were the particular vocations chosen? Were they based on any market research?

A: The decision to choose particular vocations were based on the following:

1. financial feasibility
2. based on the ability of the students.

Q: The school has 75% attendance because of health issues. Can you elaborate?

A: A good number of students are affected by fits once in a while. And some of the students with weak immunity system get further affected when they have fits. When the students have fits, it pushes the brain development cycle a little behind. The fits are caused because of irregular use of medicines provided by NIH.

Q: Have they been any injuries in any of the vocational trainings (e.g. candle-making)?

A: No, there have not been any injuries. Only students with the correct ability are allowed. Moreover, attention is paid to the predisposition of the child to a particular activity. For instance, candle-making involve other activities like applying oil to finished candles. So, students who like doing that part of the job are encouraged to do it.

Q: What about further training of the teachers? Are there any plans? Since NIMH is nearby, should this be included in the plans and budget?

A: One teacher completed DVT – Diploma in Vocational Training. All the expenses for the teacher training so far are bore by the organization/school. Other than that, so far, some teachers have been sent to NIMH for short-term training spanning 2-3 days. This used to be a free training earlier, but NIMH charges something around Rs. 100 per day now. This has not been included in the budget, since it is only short-term training so far.

Q: What vehicle can they purchase using Rs. 75000? Do they need special vehicle for the kids?

A: A first-hand auto or a second-hand matador van can be purchased for Rs. 75000, as per the estimates received by the school. So far, special requirements for the kids have not been deemed necessary or accounted for. This is because only a small fraction of the students have psycho-motor disabilities. Also, since this is the first vehicle for the school and it suffices for majority of the students this is what the school has settled for.

Q: Can they not send teachers to NIMH for most recent training & research?

A: This has not been planned yet, because of lack of resources.

Q: Can we get funds from big companies in Hyderabad?

A: The short answer is that big companies would be reluctant to process very small orders. This is possible when the school grows in strength to produce substantial output that meets the demands of big companies.

Other questions answered during the presentation

Q: What are the criteria for admitting the students?

A: Minimum age requirement is 5 years. Other than that there are no other criteria. Students are recruited by convincing the parents to send the children to school.

Future plans

The school plans to shift to a new location in Alwal, Hyderabad by March 1st 2008. The school is right now located in Patigadda Colony, Secunderabad. This decision was based on the following points that resulted from conducted surveys:

- There are 30+ mentally challenged children wanting to attend school. They have to travel a great distance at this time, and would like a school at a closer location.
- There is no special school in the new locality.
- There is lot of encouragement from the parents in the new locality. Even though the majority of students surveyed now come from middle-class families, the school wants to retain the model of FREE education and special personal attention to all students.
- The rent at the current location is growing exponentially and the school is not able to secure a new place at the current location.
- The accommodation for the school is reasonable at the new location.

What about site visit?

We can have a site visit conducted any time. It will be a good idea to have two site-visits done at both locations – the current location and the new location in March 2008. (This is in my humble opinion.) The organization is requesting for funds after the location change is completed, and claims to be self-sufficient till then.

Re-cap

These are the funds requested (3290USD at Rs 38/USD):

Line Item	Amount	One time / Annual
Vehicle purchase	Rs. 75,000 /-	One time
Vocational training equipment – 1 (paper cutting)	Rs. 35,000 /-	One time
Vocational training equipment – 2 (candle making)	Rs. 15,000 /-	One time
TOTAL	Rs. 125,000 /-	One time

Detailed budget for 3 years can be found in the initial budget proposal.