

Aashayam Parents Association

Chapter supporting the project: Asha Kansas

The site visit is done by Nancy Morthala and Sandeep Morthala (Asha Frankfurt Volunteers)

Date: 5th March 2020

We have contacted Mrs. Lakshmi, project coordinator, on 4th March and communicated about our visit the next day. On 5th noon project partner picked us up from the train station. We arrived at Aashayam center around 2 pm and stayed there till 6 pm.

Aashayam was started in 2008 by Mrs. Lakshmi along with other parents of children with special needs. It is running in the building owned by Mrs. Lakshmi. The premises are used round the clock for different purposes. Most of the Aashayam activities are taking place on the ground floor. That includes the office, classes for younger children, paper bags making, incense sticks making, computer room, couple of storerooms. On the second floor is the tailoring unit, where the cloth/jute bags are made. Mrs. Lakshmi's family lives on the first floor. A couple of staff members live in the ground floor rooms, which are used during the day for different activities. One teacher uses the ground floor hall for tuitions after the center is closed.

Currently, there are 50 students, out of that 12 are females. On the day we visited, there were about 35 students present. The ages of the students are between 4 and 40 years.

There are classes for younger children with the aim of joining them in mainstream schools once they learn the basics. Each child gets about 1 hour of one to one activity session with the teacher. This session is for the children to learn at their own pace and do creative activities.

For older students, the focus is to make them self-sufficient through vocational training and providing necessary life skills. Vocational training includes making paper bags, incense sticks, Diwali diyas, and jute/cloth bags. Apart from teaching the skills, this activity also generates revenue, which is paid as an honorarium for students.

Aashayam has a computer training center to train data entry for the students. They are working with an organization from Bangalore to train the students, and the organization gives data entry projects for students.

They also have a nursery 18 km from Hyderabad, and each student gets to go there once a month to do gardening and spend time in nature.

Success stories:

The focus at Aashayam is to make the children with special needs to self-sufficient so that they can be integrated into mainstream. That means for younger children, getting into mainstream schools and for older children getting employment. It can take several years, till then they need to be trained and taken care of.

Below are some of the students who were successfully trained at Aashayam:

- Yaseem going to normal school after training at Aashayam.

- Puneet found the work in a paper plate making unit
- Mallik found the work in a petrol pump
- Mani is working as a helper in a foundry workshop
- Shabir has found work in a pickles factory

New requirements:

Over the years Aashayam team and students, part of vocational training making beautiful products for companies and individuals. They have won several awards for their creative work. Because of a lack of marketing, they could not fully utilize the potential. With the right training in marketing, they can grow their revenues so that they can become partially financially self-sufficient.

Current premises are very congested, and this also restricts the movement of students freely. Mrs. Lakshmi has access to land, and if they could get funds for infrastructure, it would help them tremendously.

Concluding Remarks:

Mrs. Lakshmi and the staff at Aashayam are very dedicated to the cause. It is close to their hearts, and for them, it is their life. Over the years, they have gained so much experience in dealing with special needs children. If they could get additional resources to improve marketing and also possibly construct their own premises, they can reach more such children. It was wonderful that Asha Kansas chapter is supporting the project. We strongly recommend to continue the support and if possible, to consider new requirements.

Photos:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1sKYJn2bPYJNZXsU9>