

# **Antyodoy Anath Ashram**

## **Khagendra Sishu Siksha Kendra (KSSK) and Vocational Training Unit**

### **Site Visit Report (Virtual)**

19<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2021, 8:30 AM to 10:30 AM (India Time)

18<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2021, 9 PM to 11 PM (Austin Time)

(YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzOibUcvxLw>)

## **Attendees :**

### **Asha-Austin**

- Rangakrishnan Srinivasan (Chapter Projects Coordinator)
- Subra Nathan (Chapter Treasurer)
- Mohit Sood (Chapter Coordinator)
- Shruti Motiwale (Social Media Coordinator)
- Atanu Bhattacharya (New Volunteer)
- Minal Ahuja (FR coordinator)
- Subhangi Ghosh (Project steward)

### **Antyodoy**

- Shri. Balaram Karan (Founder)
- Manoj Kumar Dey (Coordinator and Treasurer)
- Surajit Pal (Vocational Training Unit)
- Subrata Das (Tailoring, Vocational Training Unit)
- Shibani Pahari (Tailoring, Vocational Training Unit)
- Kanika Adhikari (Arts & Crafts, Vocational Training Unit)
- Pratyush Mandal (Fabric Painting, Vocational Training Unit)
- Sourabh (Computer Training Unit)
- Suryakanto Karan (English Teacher, Class 4, KSSK)
- Lakshmi Maiti (Kindergarten Teacher, KSSK)
- Alakesh Mandal (Teacher, KSSK)
- Nabanita Jana (Alumnus, Antyodoy)
- Radhi Yadab (Alumnus, Antyodoy)
- Priyanka Maiti (Alumnus, Antyodoy)
- Munmum Jana (Alumnus, Antyodoy)
- Rahul Manna (Alumnus, Antyodoy)

## **Overview**

Antyodoy Anath Ashram, an orphanage, was established in 1995 by Mr. Balalram Karan. Antyodoy has two separate branches located close to one another at Paushi village, and a third branch 25Km away at Mandarmani. The Paushi location is the main location and is the focus of Asha-Austin, and this virtual tour. The Ashram houses about a hundred children. KSSK is the primary school associated with the ashram and it caters to children from the ashram and surrounding villages. KSSK has been supported by Asha-Austin since the summer of 2020. The Vocational Training Unit (VTU) has been supported by Asha-Austin since Oct. 2021. Their aim is to assist the Ashram residents and women and older children from the surrounding village to learn a craft that may be used for earning livelihood.

Travel restrictions during Covid-19 have prevented in-person site visits, therefore a virtual site visit was held with six members of Asha Austin in attendance. The meeting was led from Antyodoy's side by Mr. Manoj Kumar Dey. Manoj is the coordinator and treasurer of KSSK. Parts of the conversation were in Bengali, which was translated by Subhangi. Although in-person classes were not being held at KSSK

(except for ashram residence), few non-resident students were asked to join in-person for KSSK classes for the virtual site visit, to better understand some aspects of its operation.

## **Vocational Training Unit**

The tour opened with Manoj introducing us to the VTU. The VTU offers training and resources to pursue vocational crafts such as creating artistic decorative pieces, manufacturing handmade household items for daily use, tailoring etc. The products generated from the VTU are sold in a store within the ashram. In 2021, since October the VTU generated approximately INR 50,000 in revenue for the ashram.

Surajit Pal, who oversees the VTU, introduced the exhibition room and sales outlet where the finished products are displayed and sold. Products included hand crafted jewelry and home decoration goods, jute products, handmade phenyl, charcoal soaps, incense sticks and clothing items. All products are cataloged, and items sold are accounted for. As of now the products are sold locally but the market in the greater Kolkata area, and outside is being explored.

Subrata Das, along with Shibani Pahari guided us through the tour of the Tailoring class of VTU. Video showed women working at individual workstations with sewing machines. This unit started in Dec. 2019 but had closed for a while because of covid-19. Shibani teaches tailoring and informed us that they make a variety of clothes including petticoats, nighties, ethnic wear for men, embroidery work etc.

Kanika Adhikari is the Arts and Crafts teacher of the VTU. Video showed students making candles, rakhis, decorative items made of straw, creating jewelry, and working with jute. This is the unit where most of the household usage items, and decorative items are made, which are displayed in the exhibition room/sales outlet.

Pratyush Mandal took us through a tour of the Fabric unit, where he teaches fabric painting on some of the clothing items produced in the tailoring unit to create an artistic finished product. He walked us through their process beginning with the creation of a stencil of the design, then using it to imprint the fabrics, and hand painting the printed design. The hand painted clothes are among the most popular items sold from the VTU store.

The computer training unit tour was conducted by Sourabh. He is a computer and electronics engineer by training, and a tutor here. Video showed students in computer class and a tutor giving instructions. This unit was established two years ago, and they cater to 55 students (grades 10 to 12). Sometimes adults, and women also train here. They provide computer application tutorial, and computer education with focus on data entry and using office tools that will help in obtaining jobs. Antyodoy assists in the recruitment of their students in government jobs focused on data entry as well as they have agreements with corporate/IT companies in Kolkata to place their students after completion of training.

## **Primary School**

KSSK, the primary school, educates students from lower KG to class 4. KSSK has been open throughout the covid-19 pandemic because of its successful virtual schooling program to support its non-resident students. We were introduced to a few of the KSSK teachers in their respective classes and saw some of the classes in progress. Suryakanto Karan toured us through an English class teaching vowels and consonants to 50 students from class 4. Lakshmi Maiti is a KSSK teacher who teaches the lower and upper KG students. At the time the kids were enjoying their outdoor play time. Alakesh Mandal is a KSSK

virtual teacher. He teaches science to class 3 and 4. After graduating from KSSK, students from the ashram attend the government school - Paushi BSA Brinda Mandir from class 5 to 12. A team of class 8 kids from the ashram, who took part in a robotics event in Delhi, also demonstrated their skills with the robot they built.

### **Meet with the alumni**

Previous residents of the ashram who have graduated and are now successfully pursuing their jobs/careers joined us virtually to introduce themselves and tell us their stories. Nabanita Jana from Howrah District Hospital is a third-year nursing student. Radhi Yadab is a law student in Haldia Law college. Priyanka Maiti, who completed nursing school from Howrah District Hospital, is now working as a staff nurse at Rabindranath Tagore International Institute of Cardiac Science in the covid section. Munnum Jana is a first-year nursing student at Uluberia Nursing Training School at Howrah. Rahul Manna was an exemplary student who excelled at math. He is now the manager at a company.

### **Meet with the Founder**

We had the good fortune to meet Mr. Balaram Karan, the founder of Antyodoy Ashram. He narrated the story of how the ashram came into being and eventually grew and became recognized in different places of West Bengal which helped them support more children with time, and establish different units like the KSSK school, and the VTU. Mr. Karan expressed his gratitude towards Asha Austin for all the help they received for helping them rebuild after the Amphan cyclone disaster and re-establish their self-sustaining vegetable, fishery, and electricity units. Asha Austins' help during Covid times also kept the school open and they were the only primary school in the region, surpassing every government school, that continued their primary education through virtual medium. He extended his invitation towards every Asha Austin member, to visit and enjoy the ashram, to stay with them, and experience the work they are doing. They are thankful to Asha Austin not only for the financial help, but also for giving them the motivation to continue to improve and help those in need.

We were treated to a dance performance on a song by Rabindranath Tagore by the ashram kids. The tour ended with Tanishka Banerjee, an ashram resident, singing a beautiful song about hope.