Residential Camps

Children who are not coming in Jiwan Shiksha Pahal regularly or covered in Basti center need to be connected with reading writing through residential camps. Most of these children are earning member of their families and therefore it is difficult for them to come on JSP or in Basti center. Some parents put pressure on child to earn and to support family. Children feel it is their responsibility too. That’s why it is necessary to bring out the child from this situation. We believe that extended periods outside the immediate environment are necessary for bringing in a faith to be able to overcome their life conditions, and therefore these camps become a venue for providing them stress free and appropriate environment for learning.

Residential Camp- Ratibad-1 June to 31 August

This is third residential camp organized by Muskaan. With the help of the Education Department, we got permission for organize a camp in Ratibad High School. Ratibad is a rural cluster, 15 km. far from Bhopal city.

In this Ratibad residential camp, 36 children were present regular. Some of these children consistently attended three camps. We reached to 93 children by this camp and 29 children have become very regular in the Muskaan centers, whereas others still have regularity issues. Specific details per child are enclosed.

Studies in the Camp

It was possible to give very focused attention to all the children, and the children learnt in all the subjects. As team members, we were also more organized and had learnt from earlier camp experiences and there was better class conduct. The children had classes on the two languages and mathematics. Activities of environmental studies had discussions and observations.

Children watched some nests of sparrows and their eggs near the campus. It was amazing for them to see the birds coming out from eggs.

Children made many posters and illustrations during this camp.
Activities in the camp

Clay work, puppet making, creative uses of wastes, and dance - yoga activities done time to time in a planned manner. We organized a Science toys making workshop for children; this was continued after its initial start-up with Ashok Bhai from IUCAA, Pune. Children enjoyed these immensely. Dayashankar sold a toy made by self in local market.

Weekly activities by the other team members of Muskaan enabled children to learn various skills – weaving of mats using old cloth, making paper bags, puppetry and other things.

Plays and music were also regularly done. As Aman a child said that he feels restless if he is not able to act out and say a dialogue.

Outings

We scheduled regular visits in this camp as this was not very far from
the city; Children were taken out for a visit to Samasgarh a place of historical importance. Children observed broken statues and pillars lying there. They asked many questions regarding all these things. Who made this all? How old these temples are? Whose statues are these? Who has broken these statues? Children assembled a broken statue there too.

During the camp, Children joined a Baal Mela organized by BGVS, another organization. They enjoyed a film festival there being organized by Comet Media.

They went to the Manav Sangrahalaya and saw a folk dance performed by tribal artists with traditional musical instruments.

A group of four older children were taken to Raipur for a meeting and rally on tribal displacement.

The children often went to the riverside and fields near the camp venue.

**Baal Panchayat**

The evening meeting was conducted by the term, baal panchayat, on alternate days. One person was appointed the convener and another the assistant. The children brought all the issues and problems and achievements to this platform. The teachers also did the same, and the convenor with her/his assistant suggested ways of remedy.
If a specific child was not willing to sit in the class, Guddi, as a convenor, advised the teacher to try different things, as speak to him separately, pay more attention to the child, and if the teacher came back saying s/he had tried this and it was working out well, it was closed at that, but if s/he said that it was not resolved yet, then Guddi would either suggest something else, or calmly explain the teacher to let the child be.

On one occasion, when the camp children’s other friends came from the bastis to spend one day and night with them, there was a complaint in the baal panchayat meeting that the things were not as per schedule because of them. The suggestion from the convenor was that even though they are ten of them, we are many more and therefore if the camp children decided that things have to continue properly, they would teach the ‘guests’ also.

Meditation

In addition to the morning exercises, we conducted meditation exercises in the evening. While the morning exercises were to stretch your muscles and physical fitness, the meditation was trying to build concentration and reflection and being with oneself.

The children are a bundle of thoughts and energy; often destructive also. They also come with many negative experiences of violence and neglect. These come out in various forms, hurting oneself and each other.

We conduct the meditation exercises to help children to become comfortable with themselves and on their own. Different exercises help in ventilation of feelings buried inside; we have tried a combination of EFT (Emotional freedom technique) and other imagination or projection methods, along with concentration on parts of the body and breathing.

Initially, all the children did not sit concertedly but this changed over the days and while majority was sitting and being part of it, others would get up and go out without disturbing if they didn’t want to be present for the while sitting.

While we don’t have a way of measuring the effectiveness of this individually as the result is a cumulation of various interventions the child would go through in that period, our sense is that this has helped children towards finding themselves.

Ownership of the camp

The camp has been a very joint effort. There was a clear sense that everybody as working collectively, in coordination with each other. There was no resistance in the objectives, and everyone wanted to work it out. There were many examples of this in the camp, and also in the air – the interactions.
We broke for the holidays of Rakhee for three days, and this was done through a persistent demand and consultations with the children. And they all came back also properly after that. The biggest threat in breaking a camp mid-time, is that the children would not be able to come back or may themselves get distracted. But they overcame this, and while some took more than the allotted holidays to come back, all of them did.