

## **Ek Kadam Report-2008**

**Apna Skool:** The Apna School project attempts to reach to the underprivileged children of migrant labourers with education, intellectual and artistic entertainment and awareness of health, hygiene and social issues. Another endeavour is to provide nutrition to the children and to protect them from child labour.

Initiated by Vijaya didi during the late eighties, Vivekananda Samiti, a student wing of IIT Kanpur, along with some volunteers started the education of the children of migrant labourers on the campus. Opposition from the contractors in the initial years prompted Vijaya didi and some members of IIT community to start a movement to fight for the minimum wages of the labourers and also to provide for an educational environment for their children. This led to an independent forum and organization, Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti in order to address the issue of education and welfare of these underprivileged children on a larger scale.

Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti is working for children's education and welfare. It is running schools for the underprivileged children and working towards their social and economic development. It is also attempting to develop an effective and meaningful academic and vocational curriculum, educational materials and teaching kits at primary and secondary level, training the teachers, and establishing alternative employment resources, with no undue stress on academic excellence. Jagriti aims to bring people of various expertise to one platform for the betterment of education scenario in the country.

Jagriti has been working for providing educational environment for these children for the last many years. The peculiar characteristic of moving to and fro from the native place to the cities in search of work diminishes the educational possibilities of the children. Jagriti has been facing this problem with the children. We are not sure when the children will move from the work site. It is all the same, very difficult to keep track of these children and to continue their study. Apart from this there are very many problems as well which includes the issues of child labour, financial condition of the family, etc.

***Ek Kadam*** is a residential educational project for migrant workers' children. At present there are 12 children. The ultimate goal is to have a hostel for 100 children; we propose to add 10 children every year. Also proposed are training for higher studies & various competitive exams. The focus is on the all-round development of these children as the objective is to make them good and responsible citizens of the

country. Hence utmost care is taken to provide them with ‘value-based education’ in its truest sense so that they can evolve into wonderful human beings and contribute meaningfully to their nation. It is our hope and sincere belief that this is a small, yet significant step towards the making of a free India – free from ignorance and evils such as child labour, forced migration, etc.

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, It expects what never was and never will be.” (Thomas Jefferson)

We propose to give Vocational training after 10<sup>th</sup> class – computer repairing, accounting, marketing (of products), receptionists’ job training, Bee keeping, screen printing, farming, vermiculture.... the idea is to encourage them to ultimately get integrated within their village and be engaged in income generating jobs and self reliance. This would be a step forward in eliminating the Migration problem.

The students also stage street plays in many brick-kilns where Apna skools are run [places like Badhavan, Saran] based on themes of education and corruption. These activities, in turn, inspire the parents to send other children to the Hostel as well.

The members of the hostel comprise of the children of migrant workers who work at brick kilns. The average age of children is 10-14 years. All these children were child labourers working in the brickfield helping their parents in their work.

It began with two children (Sagar and Lavkush) joining the foster home on June 3, 2006 and one more (Jitendra) joined them on 15<sup>th</sup> of June and the rest of the children on 25<sup>th</sup> of June. While we were searching for a place where we might locate the hostel, they stayed at the Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti office until 7<sup>th</sup> of July before they moved to the current home at Nankari village near IIT Kanpur campus. On 5<sup>th</sup> of July they got formally admitted to the Swami Vivekanand Vidyalaya at Lodhar village (run by Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti, which aims to be a model school in primary education) and got the taste of going to a regular school for the first time in their life. There are three children each in the Sixth class (Sonu and Mukesh), Fifth class (Ashok, Jitendra and Dharmendra), Fourth class (Gyan Chand, Lavkush, Sagar and Hans Raj) and two in Class two (Chandan and Jamuna).

### **Inspiring Incident:**

Two of our young residents of Apna skool, Jitendra and Gyan Singh from Hamirpur UP have an inspiring story to tell. Parents of Jitendra and Gyan Singh work at the Nahar Kothi brick kiln migrating from Hamirpur every year. Nahar Kothi has an apna skool center.

Recently in October 2007, the parents took advance money from another petty contractor who intended to take them to another area Etawah as he promised them to pay little more wages. Jitendra and Gyan Singh were able to confront the contractor

and convince their parents to go back to the same brick-kiln site (Nahar Kothi) so that their siblings studying in Apna skools could continue with their education. This, we believe is because of the greater awareness that the children have gained due to proper educational environment. As a result, most parents of the children studying in Apna skools want to keep coming back to the same site for continuation of education. Some of the children have even stayed back in their villages as they join village schools. All these steps could be a possible solution to curb migration.

**Activities** :( A list of all the activities that the students of the hostel were involved in during the past one year (Dec. 2006 to Dec. 2007)

- 1) **December 2006:** went to Banaras ( Asha's Kaithi Center) & stayed with Vallabhji & learnt Bee keeping , vermicompost , growth procedure of aromatic plants, Pottery, painting ; visited historical places- Sarnath, Vishwanath Mandir, Bharat Mata Mandir, Ram Nagar. They also visited a museum and saw Ashok Stambh.
- 2) **12<sup>th</sup> April 2007:** Rashtriya Nukkad Natak Diwas – staged a street play “Rangasiyar” on corruption in Politics in front of Reserve Bank of India Fool Bagh Kanpur.
- 3) **1<sup>st</sup> May 2007:** Shanti March in Kanpur- Ramasray Park to Gandhi Statue in phoolbag ; also staged a street play based on anti-social activities [dowry,alcoholism]. Around the third week of May participated in the annual function of Apna school held at the Dhamikheda centre.
- 4) **Summer vacation: from 20<sup>th</sup> May to 15<sup>th</sup> June, year 2007 :** Children went to the Brick-fields and helped the parents in brick making.
- 5) **20<sup>th</sup> June- end of June:** children were in Asha's Kaithi center, Banaras to take training in handicrafts, painting, flower , doll, pen stand making and learnt to make Friend-ship bands which are selling like hot cakes in I.I.T and in the neighbor-hood. A professor from MIT College Delhi Dr S.Chaudhary and Rashmi provide 5 days training on these items.
- 6) Mr. Daniel, pursuing a bachelor's degree from an American university, visited “Apna Ghar” in the month of July. Impressed with the Ek Kadam report on the ASHA website he decided to stay here and spend some time with

the students. He taught them English and mathematics. He also interacted with the children at the Swami Vivekanand Vidyalaya in Lodhar.

- 7) **15<sup>th</sup> of August:** Participated in the Independence day celebrations. Sang a group song on environment. They participated in a program organized by Jan Chetna Kala Manch named “Ek Shaam Shaheedon Ke Naam” and played ‘Sawa Ser Gehun’ and ‘Girgit’
- 8) **September, October and November:** Monthly exams and Dusshera holidays during which they visited their parents.
- 9) The students assisted members of Jan Chetna Kala Manch, a local awareness group, in **organizing a book exhibition** of *Pitara*, educational books published by Ekkalyva, Hoshangabad.
- 10) Students of Ek kadam took on teaching responsibilities and gained valuable **teaching experience** during Diwali holidays by taking teaching assignments at the Badhavan and Kalra brick kiln for a period of two weeks. In this period they actively participated in the works at Brick Clines with their parent.
- 11) The students bring out a **weekly News Bulletin** “Baal Jagat” which is put up at the notice board of the hostel and read by visitors. The students get an opportunity to hone their creative writing skills and also a sense of awareness of their surrounding environment by collecting information of the same. The bulletin consists of short stories, local news, and paintings.
- 12) The students are part of **“earn while you learn” scheme**. They sell products made by them like friendship bands, candles, and handicrafts like pen stand, paintings, kundan, artificial jewelers and so on. Every child has a bank account opened in his name wherein they deposit the money earned from these activities.

### **Daily Timetable:**

A typical day in the hostel starts at 5 AM with jogging for about 15 minutes followed by Yoga and physical exercises. Shri Pradeep Yadav, appointed as a warden-cum-cook for the hostel starts breakfast proceedings in which the children provide the assistance. The children help Pradeep in all the



housecleaning and maintenance activities at the home and this helps them develop a sense of belonging to the Institution, which they have named *Apna Ghar*.

**Daily Timetable:**

5:30 am waking time

6:00 am: Jogging

6:30 am- 7:30 am: house cleaning and getting ready for school

7:30-8:00 am: Study

8:00 am: Breakfast

8:15 am – 2:30 pm: School

3:30-4:30 pm: study

4:30 pm- 6:30 pm: play

7:00 – 8:00 pm: homework

8:00 pm: prayer

8:15 pm: students meeting; discussion of the activities during the day, settling of disputes, if any, amongst the students

9:30 pm: Dinner

Report by Vijaya Ramchandran

Mo. +91-9415307196

E-mail: rvijaya26@yahoo.co.in