

Shraddha Report July 2006

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Summary

Shraddha is operating two centers aimed at the education of physically disabled and/or mentally retarded children in the Ohm Nagar Colony in Sarnath, Varanasi.

The first center, called Ohm Nagar, has existed since the year 2001 and employs three teachers, one supporting staff and a project coordinator (Aparana Rani) and cares for 25 children. It is an IBR (Institutional Based Rehabilitation) and on Saturdays home visits are organized to discuss the progress and problems with the parents. The infrastructure is comprised of a small house where Anil Kumar and his wife Aparana Rani who initiated the project, inhabit the second floor.

The second center, called Taka Saraia, is new and opened in the year 2005. It is within 5 km of the main center. 8 children are looked after, of which 5 come to the school and three are visited at home (CBR; Community Based Rehabilitation). One teacher is employed and the schooling shall take place in a very basic hut (until it will have been restored, teaching takes place in the neighboring house at higher rent, 1'500 Rs/month.). This teacher has completed 15 years of training (12 years primary school, 3 year graduation and 1 year specialization). His salary is 2'500 Rs per month.

Classes take place from Monday to Friday, 4 hours a day. The children who have walking problems are picked up by rickshaw. Otherwise, all children are within 1 walking hour from the school. If possible, the parents are expected to pay for the transport services.

Shraddha has FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) status, meaning foreign charity organizations can directly donate funds to Shraddha.

The Children

As an initial step, Shraddha makes a survey and tries to convince the parents to send their children to their special schools. The children are then assessed psychologically and functionally. They are between 6 and 25 years old; 25% are girls. The mentally disabled children are grouped into 3 categories: mild, moderate and severe.

The mild group has roughly an IQ between 50 and 70 and can acquire some academic knowledge (up to class 4, i.e., equivalent to children of age 11) vocational skills

(handicraft). Although discriminated, they can be employed to perform manual work (e.g., farming or cleaning sector).

For the moderate group, the IQ is above approximately between 35 and 50. They can be educated to a certain extent to read and write and to learn pre-vocational skills. Employment is also possible. Usually in form of sheltered employment with no pay, usually in larger cities.

The severe group has IQs below 35. In their curriculum they need special emphasis, such as toilet training and other daily living skills. The severe cases of mental disability with an IQ below 24 can not interact with their environment and are custodial and hence are not educated within the Shraddha program.

Most mentally disabled children suffer from cerebral palsy or Down's syndrome. Some of the children have only physical disabilities. But due to lacking support and/or awareness, deaf or blind children can go for years without proper education, reducing their IQ score. One child from an impoverished family with a normal intellect but suffering from Polio could never go to school up to now. Only Shraddha's rickshaw service allows him to get education.

In addition to their disability, some of the children show hyperactive or problematic behavior.

Funding 2005

Shraddha has received funding from the following organizations in 2005:

WLC (World Literacy Canada)	153'880 Rs
Asha Redland California	50'000 Rs
noon.ch	16'000 Rs
Mr. Vallabh from Asha	10'000 Rs (for visiting other centers)
Private and Institutional funds	42'000 Rs

The first center has received 130'000 Rs from WLC and the second 50'000 Rs from Asha. 20'000 Rs from WLC were used for participating at the Special Olympics. This was seen as a great success and is hoped to be continued in future. 3'880 Rs from WLC was used for training costs.

For the 16'000 Rs supplied by noon.ch, the following was invested:

- 9'950 Rs in IT infrastructure
- 3'000 Rs as the salary for a rickshaw driver
- 3'050 Rs as expenses (stationary, ...)

Outlook

WLC has stopped the funding of Shraddha as of July 2006. As an immediate consequence, the teachers salaries have been halved. Talks with WLC continue, so the status of future funding is unknown. Another consequence of this could be, that Shraddha converts the 2nd center to a CBR (no center, only teacher visiting homes), meaning that the children can be educated at a lower cost .

Shraddha is planning to or has already applied for additional funds:

Asha Houston (applied; visit from Asha representatives)

CBR Forum (planned)

CRY (Child Relief and You; applied)

Global Fund For Children (applied)

Government Fund (pending; Shraddha needs to be a registered organization)

noon.ch will wait with it's funding proposal until the status of Asha Houston and WLC is known.

Visit from noon.ch

We met Anil Kumar on the 9th of July 2006 in Varanasi. Andi, Pascal and James interviewed him about the achievements of the past year and his visions and future prospects.

Pascal and James visited both centers on the 10th of July 2006. It was very interesting and impressive to see the work and commitment of the Shraddha staff. The children were very calm and the classes could be conducted in an orderly manner. We got a glimpse of what it means to dedicate ones efforts to the caring of disabled children. It is a noble cause to invest in individuals who are marginalized and ignored by society. And although there are only a total of 33 children supported by the two centers, this means the possible betterment of the situation and a brighter future of 33 human beings.

From a more critical point of view, we must mention two things. For one, the investment of 9'950 Rs in the repair of a secondhand computer and printer is suboptimal. The state of the computer is pretty dismal (no CD burner, extremely slow, ...) and, as a benchmark, for 20'000 Rs one can get a brand new laptop and for 1'500 Rs a new printer. In addition, the rent for the new center is 400 Rs a month and it is a valid question if paying the rent for two years (9'600 Rs) would not have been a more meaningful investment.

Secondly, although it is generally a good idea to expand and open a new center. If the funding is not guaranteed - as is currently the case - this is an unsustainable investment. It would be tragic if the second center is closed, only after being operational for a few months. So in essence, one should only consider expansion when having established the core of the operation and its sustainable funding.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the salaries of the teachers are quite low. This, however, does luckily not hinder their motivation.

General Remarks

There are 20 similar schools in the vicinity of Varanasi, some of which focus on particular disabilities of the children (such as deaf and blind children).

Often parents of disabled children fail to see the benefit of educating their children (“no return on investment”). Additionally, as it is very cost intensive to care for disabled children, there is also the attitude that this money could be used to support many more “normal” children.

Although the government provides a pension for disabled persons over the age of 18, this is a symbolic sum of 360 Rs a year.

On a more general note it has been observed that the family structure in India is currently undergoing a change. Namely, the transition from big joint families providing care for disabled people (children and old people) to Western style small nucleus families not being able to provide care for dependent individuals. This will inevitably impose further difficulties on institutions like Shraddha and the society in general. The reaction of the Indian government will determine the direction of this development.