

Annual Report for the year - June2014 – May2015

After the summer camp in May, the children were given 5 days holidays before starting the new academic year on June 5th.

Before that we had a parent – teacher meeting on Sunday, June 1, 2014 at Ambedker Bhavan, in Pampanagar.

Out of 21 parents , 17 came for the meeting .4 of them couldn't come because they had gone to work to far away villages . Supritha's mother ,Gangamma was one of them . The meeting started at 6.30 P.M with 9 parents and the others joined one by one after returning from their work.

The following points were discussed in the meeting.

- 1) Admission of children to government school.
- 2) Getting books and uniforms from the government school.
- 3) Importance of sending children to school regularly.
- 4) Function of the centre.
- 5) Aim of the centre.

1. There were 10 children of the age group 6 years, attending the centre regularly and who have to be admitted to std.1 in the government school. Some parents admit their children on their own and some are either ignorant or not that serious about this. They need some guidance in doing this.
2. Children whose names are already enrolled in the government school register in different standards and are attending the centre, have to go to the government school to get their new uniforms , text books for the new year and also for other government benefits. Again few parents are alert and get all these for their children and many are ignorant and careless and children suffer. They need help and guidance in this.
3. children who are interested to learn, come to the centre happily, regularly and in time. Nevertheless all the children need the love, attention and care of their parents for their physical and emotional needs. If they feel they are not getting it, they will demand it from the parents in many ways, even get sick, real or unreal. They will not come to school either.
This is one main reason for irregular attendance and dropouts. If parents become aware of this, then within their limited capacity they could do something and help their children understand their love for them and also help them understand parents problems and difficulties.
4. The function of the centre - Though parents appreciate our work for their children, for them this being an informal learning place their attitude is “ let the children go to the centre as long as they like to.” we felt they are not taking it seriously though we have told them earlier about the centre.

We told them that we are not a private registered school. Our aim is to supplement and support the government school in the area. To reduce the dropouts number and to improve the quality of education for Pampanagar children , because Pampanagar is a segregated, schedule caste area .

5. Apart from this the centre also has a specific aim. So it is not a baby sitting centre for the parents to dump their children when they become obstacles for their life and work. Neither have we started the centre just like that for some time, as long as we have funds to run it.

Prakash who was motivated to start this centre for these children, started with a dream, not realizing the hardships involved in putting into practice this dream. His interest is to work with a group of young children for at least 10-12 years, form a strong youth group who will bring about a social change in their community and in the locality. Realizing the risks involved in this sort of venture, and the good intention of a young person, I was willing to support this work. Persons who have similar minds and interest come forward most willingly to support this project financially and otherwise.

These points were seriously and clearly communicated to the parents. The parents seemed to have understood the importance of the centre from their frame of mind and expressed their willingness to co-operate with the centre. The meeting ended at about 9.P.M and all went home happy and satisfied.

We started work enthusiastically putting our heart and mind preparing for the new year. Getting the place ready, planning the syllabus and lessons for different groups etc. The parents and children on their part agreed to go the government school and get things done as decided in the meeting.

On 5th children didn't turn up as agreed. Usually children come running to the centre before going to the govt. school but strangely no one came. We thought that there may be some delay in the govt. school and they'll come. Even after 4 days they didn't come, not even one child turned up. Then we became alert and worried.

One of us went to the govt. school to find out what happened. The children were all in their respective classes in the government school. They looked very scared and behaved like strangers to our teacher. The headmaster and staff were in a meeting and so she couldn't meet them. We were surprised, not knowing the reason for their behaviour and called for a parent's meeting.

All the parents came for the meeting. Usually for our meetings mothers and one or two fathers come. This time more men were there, organized and brought by Gangamma, Supritha's mother. She started the meeting saying that the parents have problems and want to talk. We felt uncomfortable, it wasn't the usual, homely, friendly parent teacher group meeting where every one expresses their views and feelings comfortably and the group deals with them amicably, satisfying the whole group.

But in this group meeting, we felt the group wasn't friendly. There was a distance between them and us, they seemed like strangers, who were trying to question our work in an arrogant way. At first we were not prepared for a meeting like this, and were at a loss not knowing what went wrong and where. We managed to get a grip and faced the situation. The parents spoke. "we trusted and sent our children to your centre thinking they get good education and this is what we got for that".

.The head master of the government school shouted at us badly and asked us to take the T.C.'s and go. Since yours is not a registered school you cannot admit them in your school. What is the fate of our children? They were angry and anxious. For a moment I felt happy that the parents could express their feelings very freely and were concerned about their children's education. But it was a very serious issue.

We told them that before starting the centre we got the permission from the B.E.O. of the area and also the acceptance of the govt. school head master. The parents were not satisfied with this answer

they said “ unless you get a written permission from the B.E.O. and show us that, we won’t send our children to the center.

Prakash said “ we have an understanding with the head master of the govt.school and he along with his staff visited the residential learning centre in Samuha campus, appreciated the children’s work, even wanted to send more children to the campus. He even promised to give a donation of Rs. 500 and a sack of rice for the children. For the past 4 years, we are all working together based on this understanding and now suddenly what happened to you?”

The parents were not in the mood to listen to any thing. All that they wanted was a written permission from the B.E.O. Since the B.E.O. has given a verbal permission earlier, we assured the parents that we will get one soon and solve this problem ,so that the children’s learning won’t be disrupted.

As we proceeded ,we realized that the problem was not that simple as we thought it to be. It was a complicated one. When we met the B.E.O. she seemed to be very appreciative of our work and gave the permission to continue the work. She said she has spoken to the D.D.P.I. and so there was no need for a written permission and suggested that we meet the D.D.P.I. Later we realized the reason for her pleasant positive response. She was waiting for her transfer the following week.

Meeting the D.D.P.I. was an ordeal, and finally meeting him ended with a great disappointment for us. He was firm, whatever best education we give, he said the children of the age group 6-14 should be in the school from 10 AM to 4 .30.P.M., and strict action would be taken against parents and teachers who violate this instruction.

Next Prakash met the head master. His story was different. One of the members of the community, who has control and power had reported to the BEO that the Govt.,school is sending the children to the centre and the govt. teachers are idle. In his anger and anxiety the head master shouted at the parents, who did not expect this behaviour from him.

On meeting the parents group again, Gangamma said she won’t send her daughter to the centre even if we get the permission from the B.E.O. She wanted to send her daughter to Navodaya school after 2 years ,and if the child could get coaching from us for 2 years, she would send her and that to on condition that she would not send her to the residential centre but to Ambedker Bhavan , the day school. Other parents said that if Gangamma doesn’t sent her child ,they too won’t send their children. We made it clear to her that we are not a free coaching centre for Navodaya school. Supritha’s father appeared to be supportive to the centre. On his own he got the children, spoke to them and brought them to us and told them to speak to us honestly what they want. The children who were so spontaneous, free, and fearless appeared terribly frightened, were in tears, unwilling to lift their heads were dumb. We were pained to see the children in that state and told him not to force them to speak. Let them go, feel free to attend the govt. school.

He took them away, spoke to them and bought them back again and said that they are willing to talk. He asked them to talk. Children with fear crying said, ‘we don’t want to come to the residential centre and if you have school in the Ambedkar Bhavan we will come.’

We told them “ now that you are attending govt. school regularly, it is good you go there . Our aim is that you don’t become dropouts. We are happy. Don’t be afraid .Go to school .“ The children went away reluctantly.

The reality as I perceive is—The values and attitudes in life children learn in the centre are contrary to their life in Pampanagar. Though young, Supriha accepted these values and is a very strong, fearless person, who confronts her mother. It is a threat for her way of life and she always felt uncomfortable about the child's stay here. If she calls the child to come home, the child is very adamant and refuses to go home. The mother appeared very helpless in the situation and as a mother wanting her child back, planned it in such a way to get her child and she got her child, by making the other children leave the residential centre

We came back to the campus to decide what to do next? If the parents are not able to value what we give their children then closing the centre was the only solution we could perceive. We couldn't do that immediately because one 8 year child had the courage to fight with her mother and grand mother, refused to go to govt. school whatever happened to her and stayed in the centre. This appeared a burden or a problem for us in making the decision. Whether there are many children or even if it is only one, it doesn't matter. A child is a person. And if she comes to us with confidence, we should accept the child and give her the learning environment she needs. So the classes continued with one child. Slowly 2 children, Saraswathi and Durugesh took courage and came to the campus. But their parents came and took them away forcibly.

One mother who was not willing to follow the crowd approached us and told us that she wanted to send her children to the centre. When she goes to work in Bangalore she has to take her children with her and they miss school for few months. We wanted to make sure that she was not dumping them with us. She said even when she doesn't go out station to work she'll send her children to our centre. We decided to take her 4 children, all girls, one in std.10th one in std.6th, and another two in std.5th and std.1st. Now Ratnamma will not be the only child but she'll have a company of 4 more.

We began work with these 5 children and Rathnamma's elder sister Sharanamma std.7th also joined the group.

From June 17th we started working earnestly with this group of 6 children giving them the necessary basics in learning. Though they were in std 6th, 7th, they didn't know the letters of the alphabet and were ignorant of number concept. They showed interest and willingness to learn in spite of the difficulty they had in learning the basics at this age. We worked with them for 2 months, till the middle of August. They showed improvement in their studies and behavior. They are a group of lovable children.

When the community saw these children learning happily, more children from this age group were brought by their mothers. We were reluctant to take them and asked them to wait till October. One thing they were teenagers and secondly we didn't want to face another failure after working with them for 4 years.

Meanwhile taking the advice of one of our well wishes, we decided to send these 6 children to the government school from 10 A.M. - 5 P.M. and they come back to the residential centre after school and continue their studies here. This solved the problem with the educational department.

The head master was happy with the progress of these 6 children and asked us whether he could send more children to the centre. We told him if he is willing to send teachers along with the children

we could take more children and also share our teaching method with the teachers, The govt. teachers were most willing to send many children to us but they were not willing to come. So we said 'no' to this request.

Though there were only 6 children we were happy to teach them because of their willingness to learn and the effort they put in their work without feeling ashamed to learn the alphabet and numbers like nursery children.

In August, the mothers of the children who left came along with their children, Sharanabasava, Durugesh, Lakshmi, Basavaraj, Dasharath, and Chaithra. The mothers apologized and said, they made a mistake listening to people (didn't mention who the people were) and ruined their children's life. Prakash was angry and firm and wasn't willing to take them back. The parents kept on coming everyday, leaving their work, which meant they were denied of that day's wage.

Parents though want their children to come to the centre, most of them do not have the courage to oppose a person with power in the locality. I could understand Prakash's reaction. I told him "let us take a risk and accept them and give them a chance to learn from their mistake, even if we have to face another failure". He took courage and accepted these children.

Whether my belief is right or not, I feel this mistake gives children and parents a grip and courage to face and overcome a similar problem later. They have learnt a lesson. A few more older children both boys and girls came. And we were not sure how genuine they were. We said we give them a chance and a trial period of one month, during this time those who really want will stay and others will leave.

The centre is not a holiday resort. It is not a let loose place like their colony. There is discipline and hard work. They have to get up early at 5 A.M. everyday, have bath, study, work etc. also eat food not always according to their taste but what is nourishing and healthy. They cannot go home as and how they liked, but as planned in the group by the group, no roaming about, no T.V. serials but allowed to see good movies. They express in the group discussion their likes and dislikes about others and learn to accept and live with each other cordially and work co-operatively.

After one month those who could not adjust to this sort of life left. In November Saraswathi, one of the left child of last year's group came on her own. We asked her to bring her mother since her mother was – one of them who took the child forcefully from the centre.. She didn't come instead she sent her eldest married daughter to take the responsibility. The sister apologized and promised to send the child. Still not sure what the mother will do next we asked her to give in writing. She said she will give it in the next parent's meeting. Prakash told her to send the child when she brings the letter.

The child was in tears. She had the courage to come on her own. I said "let the child come and if she doesn't give the letter-then we decide." From this experience the child seemed to have got some awareness, firmness and courage to face a similar situation.. She looks a bit serious and mature now.

The parents also requested us to start the day school centre for young children at Ambedkar Bhavan because their children were roaming about.

After a comment made by a parent in the meeting, that the Anganavadi is not functioning because all the young children came to our centre, We have decided to have the day school in the campus

itself and parents who really value this education for their children will bring them to the campus in the morning and take them back in the evening. We told the parents this and 2 of them were willing. Another parent of a young child, who is an auto driver volunteered to bring his child and other young children who want to come to the centre and take them back in his auto. 7 parents accepted this offer. From September the day school for children of age 3 – 6 years started in samuha campus from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.

Though the auto driver parent volunteered, we thought it better he is paid the daily wage, so that children could come and go in time instead of him bring and take them how and when he get time.

At present we have 27 children, 20 (12 girls and 8 boys) in the residential learning centre and 7 young ones in day school, all learning taking place in Samuha campus itself. It also saves time and person.

The 7 day school children come to the centre in the morning and go home in the evening. They have their mid-day meal and snacks in the centre.

The 20 residential learning centre children are divided into 4 groups.

Group 1 std.7 and 6

Group 2 std.5 and 3

Group 3 std 1 and nursery.

Group 4 std 10

Groups 1 and 2 do not go to government school 2 days in a week stay in the center and learn. Each group choose 2 different days.

Group 3 stay in the center and learn . They go to school on 2 days.

Group 4 go to school everyday.

The headmaster of the govt.school has accepted this arrangement. He says it improves the performance of the children in his school.

All the children are regular except Chaithra who underwent an operation recently and is at home at present.

Prakash has taken the responsibility of all the groups. He sees to their getting up in the morning at 5.30. A.M. supervises the study time of all the groups till 9 A.M. Takes classes for gp.3 and the gp. which stays backs from 10 to 2. In the evening he works with them in the garden, conducts outdoor games ,classes from 6.30 to 8.30 ,then group discussions and dinner. He has a good rapport with all the children especially the boys.

I assist and support him where he needs help and see to the overall functioning of the programme. There is a cook, a school helper,a campus helper and a resource person who comes once in a month

from Bangalore. Since gardening and campus cleaning are too much for children to do we get laborers periodically for 2 or 3 days.

At present we stay in Samuha campus, free of rent , free electricity and water. We use the whole campus because there are no other programs.

Outings

Also we had an outing to Mysore for 5 days with 23 children aged 5 to 16 years and 5 staff. The children enjoyed the journey in train and visited historical places.

Learning camp

In October 2014 when the government school had a long holyday we had a learning camp for all the children in the RLC and for a few other day school children from government schools. We had volunteers from Bangalore, our friends and old students of Tilak Nagar Children centre.

Looking at the programme, now we have good feelings after going through a disaster. Hope it will continue in the same good spirit.

The 2 teachers we had for the past 6 months who came from Gulbarga didn't fit in the program. Their interests and aims are different. They couldn't make a rapport with the children. Their interest is to get a government job, so they left.

We had 3 parents meeting in July , October, and November, in the campus. The parents volunteered to contribute what they could. So far they sent 1 sack of rice, vegetables grown in one of their field, kerosene oil, 4 of them came on their own when they didn't have work and helped in cleaning washing and cooking. They volunteered to give their children slippers, soap, oil, and other items like exercise books pens, etc But when they have no work and no money we give these to the children.

The parent group is not a very strong one .They easily obey a person who has power in the locality. But they are able to recognize this and had the courage to come back at present.

Looking at the whole thing- what I see is -- the parents are not stable. The community is not stable, not even the government teachers in this locality. From this unstable environment there arises a bunch of young children who want to become stable and take the courage to become that, in spite of being shaken by this unstable environment.

But when the team working for these children which includes the teachers, the cook, the helpers and the resource person, all take the courage to support these children to grow positively , we experience happiness and peace. That's our reward.

One good thing happened this year that is wipro (applying thoughts in school) person Shreekath accepted our project proposal and agreed to give 3years grant. This grant includes purchase land for our project for Rs.35lakh and yearly running expense Rs.15lakh for 3years.

This year we received from Jomythri and wipro – as monthly advance July2014 – May2015 the sum of amount Rs.7,93,000-00.

I end this report with the drawing of a 12 years old girl. She says she is the lotus in the drawing rising above the filth and water radiating joy to others.

Peace and good wishes to all our dear friends who support us and are with us in this work Thank you.

Margaret

