

SmS Chair's Report 2014-15

Last year we celebrated the 10th anniversary of SmS as a registered charity and I outlined its main achievements in the first decade of its existence. We have started its next decade with a new vision and a wider horizon. It gives me immense pleasure to announce in this context that we have set up SmS India Foundation to raise funds in India to further support our current Indian projects, when feasible to add other deserving projects to our portfolio and to get directly involved in community welfare work. Undeniably it is a very ambitious project but we have been fortunate to bring on board 4 local well-qualified directors who have already succeeded in raising sufficient funds to pay for the initial professional and administrative costs related to the establishment of the organisation. Under the auspices of SmS India Foundation we are holding our first major event in the form of a promotional one week long Yoga and Ayurveda retreat in Chamba, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand from 26th September to 3rd October 2015. Already 30 people have registered against our target of 25 so we have closed our registrations. Also by the end of this year, construction work will start for the development of a holistic healthcare and community welfare centre in this beautiful and picturesque region of Uttarakhand to be run by SmS India Foundation on a totally non-profit basis. We have been very fortunate to get 4 acres of land at a very nominal lease for 99 years.

Review of the Year

1. Promoting Health & Fitness in the local Community:

Unfortunately, owing to my long absence from the country on medical grounds, there was a setback in the revenue from Yoga classes. Also instead of the normal 2-3 workshops, this year we were able to hold only one preventive healthcare workshop. This was held at the Jaspar Community Centre in Harrow on the 5th of June with around 25-30 people participating.

2. Community Service

On the other hand work at Sahara Bereavement Care is really progressing well. Even with very stringent recruitment standards, SBC team of volunteers has grown steadily since its inception. The request for help and support is forever growing. In 2013 SBC volunteers gave up 270 hours for home visits, 330 hours for telephone support, 41 hours for their training and self-development, 110 hours for group meetings and in-service training. In 2014, with an increase in the number of volunteers and more widespread knowledge of our services, the number of hours spent in support also increased significantly: home visits - 386 hours, telephone support - 628 hours together with a similar proportional rise in training hours. SBC has also started extending its support to people who want to live independently after bereavement.

3. Progress at our chosen Charitable Projects in India:

A. Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES)

It has been another exciting year for PPES. Not only did they manage to attain 100% pass rate for their class X and XII girls but the Uttar Pradesh Board has recognized Pardada Pardadi as a Senior Secondary School which is considered a great honour. This allows the school to start teaching Science after grade X to those interested in pursuing professional careers in Medicine, Engineering and Information Technology etc. Three of their girls have been accepted for the Community College Initiative Programme (CCIP) 2015-16, which allows them to study at a community college in the United States for a year. This is an amazing opportunity for girls who had never stepped outside their own small village.

For further development in PPES's other undertakings in the fields of Health & Hygiene, Community Development and Economic Empowerment, please refer to their CEO's report on p

B. Action for Autism (AFA)

AFA always has a very busy calendar packed with various types of assessments - Diagnostic, Functional Skills, Occupational and Sensory assessments; Intervention programmes – Open Door Day, Parent Child Training, Educational intervention, Social Communication, Occupational and Sensory Intervention etc reaching over 1000 children; Programmes for Adults, Family Support Services; Special Workshops, Conferences and other training programmes.

Last year AFA participated in collaborative research project with UCLA with its network of government and private schools and families in India.

Another important highlight was The South Asia International Autism Conference 2015 ***Difference, Not Indifference: The Way Forward***, on 7th & 8th February 2015, which saw the participation of self advocates with autism from Australia, Pakistan, Germany, South Africa and the USA.

Another major challenge that AFA has taken on is to care for the future of persons with autism, a critical area that remains largely neglected, through Residence cum Rehabilitation Project- ANANDA. It gives me great pleasure to report that last year they have completed the first phase of the construction of this ambitious project.

C. Akshay Pratishthan (AP)

Akshya Pratishthan's mission is to create an inclusive and barrier free environment for people with disabilities so that they can lead a life of equality and dignity. Today, Akshya

Pratisthan provides Inclusive education for over 490 students, Rehabilitative services such as Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy and Prosthetic and Orthotic etc., Vocational Training in Computer Sciences, Cutting and Tailoring, Beauty Culture, Arts & Craft, Electricals, Baking etc.

The year in review has been yet another remarkable period which saw the institution achieving greater heights. In addition to several other achievements, a three month skill development programme was organized for challenged adults in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment which greatly benefitted all who attended.

Also, Akshya Pratisthan organized a training session for the prestigious Aga Khan Foundation in which MCD Teachers were given comprehensive training and taught how to deal with disability issues.

To enhance exposure to the ever growing & challenging world of computer technology, in addition to the regular computer courses, Akshya Pratisthan has now gone a step further and introduced a software trainer programme.

Finally, Akshay has partnered with various overseas organizations to promote and enhance the learning experience of its students and make them more self-confident. For more info on Akshay Pratisthan visit their website: www.akshaypratisthan.org

D. Vatsalya Vatika, Haridwar: We visited Vatsalya Vatika in Dec 2014 and were really impressed by the all-round progress being made by the children. It was heartening to note that the children who have been sent to professional colleges are making good progress. However, it was disappointing to note that the progress of their new three-storey building had come to a standstill owing to lack of funds. Our local manager, Indian projects, Ms Bhawna Bagga, then visited the headquarters of Vishva Hindu Parishad and obtained an undertaking from the Secretary General that the building work would resume without further delay and should be completed within the next twelve months. The completion of this building is essential not only to provide accommodation to the children before they could refurbish the existing dormitory with a leaking tin roof but also to meet the strong demand to admit more homeless children.

4. New Initiative for the Year Ahead

To carry forward our task of community service, we propose to start short courses in Ayurveda based Preventative Healthcare for the general public. Owing to my long absence from the country, we were unable to achieve this objective in the current year.

Finally, I would like to assure you that the SmS executives are totally committed to serve the local community here and support the underprivileged in India. Your ongoing moral and financial help is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'I. Anand.' with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr Indira Anand