

FRIENDS

Newsletter of the Ragpickers Education & Development Scheme (REDS) Bangalore, India
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Hard Work...Pays



At 5.30 am in the morning, a three wheel cart pulls up on Primrose Road. The lady beings her routine work of door-to-door waste collection. The watchman of one of the office blocks on the road very confidently gives her the key to the offices and waits as she goes inside to clear the dust bins inside the offices – the confidence is because she has been working here for the past 10 years.

Jeeva now aged about 30 yrs, has been picking up waste since she was 10 yrs old. She lived with her parents in Vinayakanagar. Although her father Karupaiah worked as a mason and her mother Shanti was a helper in the Government Hospital, life was not easy.

With three children to feed and not much income, the family lived on a hand to mouth existence. When Jeeva was very young, her father met with an accident and lost his job. With her father not working, the family went through difficult times. Jeeva studied up to class five and had to leave school since the family could not afford her education and to help with the finances took to ragpicking. Eventually with the involvement of REDS, her father was employed in the Solid Waste Management Program. As a young girl she would accompany her father in the door-to-door collection work, and at the age of 13, she was married to a man whose source of income was ragpicking.

After her marriage she began to live in a slum near by - Shaktivelnagar. Married at a very young age, Jeeva had to go through many hardships, her husband had a problem with his heart and had to be hospitalized quite often and could not go to work. She took on the responsibility of not only earning for the family but also taking care of the home and her three children. After the death of her father, Jeeva took over the door-to-door collection program at the Ashoknagar ward and managed with some help from her husband. Her fortitude and patience was tested when her husband had to be hospitalized. When asked how she managed, she replied, "my rapport with the community came to my aid at times likes this, I would go as early as 6.30 am for collection, finish by 7.30am, go home, help my children get ready for school, cook and carry lunch and dinner and then go to the hospital where I would spend the rest of the day taking care of my husband. I would return the next day morning and go to the area for collection, this became a routine and I somehow managed." Even after going through all these hardships she still managed to educate her children. Her last daughter is studying in class 9th, "I do not want her to make the same mistakes my parents made, and I want to educate my children and give them a better future."

Three years ago her husband died, ever since then she has been shouldering the responsibility of supporting her family. This meant that she had to now manage the Solid Waste Management Program in Ashok Nagar on her own.

Jeeva is an ideal example of how this program has empowered those involved. Her hard work, commitment and punctuality are greatly appreciated by the residents of the area. Over the years that she has been involved in this project, she has regularly saved money and has now been able to build a small house of her own through the local Slum Board. REDS assisted in admitting her children to school. Her self confidence has enabled her to coordinate and lead the others involved in the program. She participates in the resident's meeting, where she not only shares the problems she and her team members face in their day-to-day work, she also gives suggestions on how these problems could be solved. She accompanies REDS staff to meet with the local municipal ward officers. She also represents the team at meetings with the BMP officials to discuss issues which arise.

The SWM program has helped Jeeva fulfill her dreams; with the money she saved and with a loan, she has bought a Matador (Four Wheeler) and is working with other projects also in providing similar services in apartment blocks situated on the outskirts of the city. She says, "This program has been a great help to me. In my own way, I would like to help other women like me to come up in life." When asked what message she would like to give,

she says, "I am not much educated and do not have anything to give, the least that I or any one else can give others, is a few kind words." We have much to learn from her and the others that we work with.

Ek Roshni Ki Kiran – A Ray of Light

It's a cold winter morning, the sun is just out and the fog is clearing. The grass is covered with dew, the rays of the rising sun make them look like diamonds scattered on the ground. Oblivious to the cold and the beauty around them, a group of small children – bare footed, in old and ragged clothes, with sacks on their shoulders are about their own work. Their faces break into a smile every time they see a garbage dump. They dig through the dump, pick up the scraps of paper and plastic that they need and are on their way again. A man passing by, stops and watches them, he walks up and asks them what they were doing, the children stopped rummaging through the garbage, stare at him and without saying a word run off into the streets.



This goes on for a week, at first the boys do not run away when the man approaches them. Gradually they open up and talk to him. The first to come forward is the youngest in the group. He introduces himself as Prakash Mirdha and says he lives in Dom Kocha Lowadih with his parents. The man returns every day to meet with the children and their relationship grows. The children have told him much about their families and the deplorable conditions in which they live.

Prakash's father Narayan Mirdha, is a daily wage worker and is lucky if he gets to work 2-3 days in a week. The family is not able to survive on the income he gets, so the mother Victoria Devi has decided to work. The only means of employment available is ragpicking and Prakash has to pitch in to earn for the one meal a day that the family, is able to afford. The story of the other boys in the group is similar. They pick rags from early morning, and its late afternoon by the time they have sorted the waste and sold it. The little they earn helps their mother buy rice to cook the evening meal – often the only meal they get to eat.

Prakash and the man are now good friends and Prakash takes the man to visit his home. The man is taken aback not only at the sight of where Prakash and his family live but also at the mind set and attitude of his parents. Seeing the boy's enthusiasm in going to school the man speaks to his parents and convinces them to send the boy to school. He also explains to them about the center in the area where children like Prakash are taught the basics before they are admitted to school. He remembers to tell them that not only will Prakash's education be taken care of; he will also be given a meal in the afternoon. His parents are pleased and they send Prakash to the center.

Six years later the man ... Bro. Basant Kujur – Director, REDS-Ranchi; watches Prakash walk through the winter morning, with a bag on his shoulder. The difference is now Prakash is wearing a smart school uniform with shoes on his feet. Instead of the plastic sack with waste paper, he has a school bag on his shoulders. He is off to school ... he is studying in Kindergarten at the Nirmala School – Samlong.

His parents are very proud of him, they are happy to see him in the uniform going to school. Seeing the transformation in Prakash, people in the area enquired and got to know about REDS and the work that we do and now many more children from the area have either been enrolled in school or at the center.

Prakash come to Gyan Deep in the evenings for tuitions. The financial situation of his family has not improved much, so during school vacation, Prakash goes on his rounds picking rags so that they may eat at least one meal a day.

We are happy that we have been able to bring a ray of hope into the lives of many like Prakash... we wish him the very best at school and with the support of the staff at REDS, we hope to see him succeed in life.

From reckless to responsible...



Muniraj 18 years young and an enthusiastic trainee who had completed his training in carpentry and now working as a full pledged carpenter with contractors. His family migrated from Tamil Nadu and is living in Madivala. His mother tongue is Telugu. He has one brother who got married and settled separately and one sister who had polio attack. Now the family is on his shoulder.

Before joining this skill-training center he and his friends were involved in anti social behaviors. He had the habits like smoking and substance abuse. And he was a tough boy who had struggled with the hostilities of street life. As he came into this center ,he was able to change all his character and concentrated all his energy in the skill. He had very minimum knowledge to read and write. He was working in a sari-coloring factory for three years. There he was able to earn Rs. 1500 per month. Later he dropped that job and joined with his peer group and gone for ragpicking for one year. There he got contact with REDS, they placed him in the skill-training center. He was in the first batch at the skill-training center Deepahalli.

After training he is capable of working himself. Now he is yearning Rs. 150 per day. For the past one and half years, REDS STC opened a saving account in the post office. He is always grateful to STC and often visits the training center. Whenever there is much work in the center he voluntarily comes and helps, moreover he joins with the trainees for feasts and celebrations. He feels homely and he is a good role model for the new generation. He is a good sports man. We would see, the great change and development as REDS intervened in his life. He likes to recommend many of his friends to this skill-training program. He feels that he has been dignified.

Independence Day

The 58th Independence Day was celebrated with great pride. To enable all children to participate in the event, the National Tricolor was unfurled at the various areas where REDS works.

At the Program organized at Koramangala Slum, children from the NFE Centers, Play Schools and members of the Self Help groups participated. In all there were about 500 people who stood in attention and sang the National Anthem as the Tricolor was unfurled by Fr. Ignase Arulappen, Regional Superior of the Marianist Community in India and the chief guest for the day. The program for the day began with Ms. Prema Manthesh – Program Director, REDS welcomed the Chief Guest Fr. Ignase Arulappen, guest of Honour Mr. Selvam, Councilor of the area and the participants. The program was formally inaugurated with a prayer song by the SHG members.

The guests for the day were asked to address the gathering which concluded with a speech by Mr. Lourdasamy – Coordinator SHGs. In his address he elucidated the importance of independence and freedom and the responsibility that comes with it. Talking about the disparities in society he said that even after 57 years of independence there has not been any improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the marginalized, 'the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer'. He highlighted the instances in which people in the community have been exploited and encouraged them to cultivate habits of honesty, truth, love and brotherhood, which will not only bring about real peace, and joy but in the long run, help them to improve their status in life and in society.

This enlightening speech was followed by a cultural show where the little ones from the Play schools put up songs and dances. The program ended with Fr. Ignase giving away prizes to the children who had won in the cultural competitions which were held on the day before. Ms. Lourdamary one of the Play School Teachers was given the Best Teacher award by Bro. Xavier who Coordinates the activities of the Prevention program. The children and the members went home with a sense of pride and in the hope of doing their little bit in changing the situation of their community and families.

At Madiwal in the midst of fun and frolic, a solemn moment was observed when the tricolor was hoisted by Bro. Darwin – Executive Director. Cultural competition was organized for the children and prizes were given away. At Shivajinagar the day was celebrated along with the children of the Govt. School. It was heartwarming to see our

boys standing along with the school children and singing the National Anthem as the National Flag fluttered in the early morning breeze.

Together with some moments of fun, these programs is an avenue to not only help the children understand the meaning of freedom and the responsibility that comes with it, but also to inculcate in them a sense of pride and honor for the country and those who fought in the freedom movement.

News in Brief

REDS – BANGALORE

The staff participated in the KSDC meeting regarding Kaveir Water connection in the area. REDS will only be facilitating the process. The SHG animators will take up the responsibility of collecting money for the application form and make arrangements for procuring the same; they will then help the members in filling out the forms. Once the forms are completed, they will arrange for the BWSSB officer to come to the area and the members could then submit the forms along with the required amount for the water connection.

...Street Presence

The Day-Care Center at Madiwala was inaugurated on 2nd August '04. Fr. Pragasam along with some visitors from abroad was taken to Madiwala and Shivajinagar for an orientation to the work done by REDS in these areas.

...Play School & Non - Formal Education

Children at both the Play School and NFE centers are taught according to a syllabus that has been prepared. At the NFE centers, the syllabus of the government school is followed to help children pick up from where they left.

Sanjeevini Trust, an organization working for health care in Ambedkar Nagar, has come forward to work in L.R. Nagar too as REDS has extensive contact in the area, especially with mothers and children below the age of 6 yrs. After an initial survey, 25 children who are mal-nourished have been identified in the area. One staff Ms. Begum has been identified to prepare a nutritious supplement diet which would be given to these children. This has been initiated as a pilot program and will be replicated at the other play schools depending on its success.

On the 18th of the month, a Play School was started in Shivajinagar area for children from the CSI slum. 10 children have enrolled, it has been decided to keep the number small and work with the children with the intention that at the end of the year, these children could be enrolled in a formal school.

A syllabus has also been prepared for the NFE program and tests are conducted every month. This will enable us to not only evaluate the children but the performance of the teachers as well.

... Formal Education & placements

Follow-up of the children placed at the various hostels was done in the month of July. Based on the feed back from the follow-up done of the children placed in schools and sponsored by REDS, it has been decided to conduct tuitions for the children in the evening. One of the members for the Self Help Groups has come forward to help these children with their studies in the evening hours after school. A meeting was held with the parents of children who go to the local government schools in that area and from the 4th of October, tuitions will be held for these children from 5 – 7 pm at L.R. Nagar.

...Solid Waste Management

Uniform and ID cards have been given to the personnel involved in the program. The resident association of Eagle Street has asked REDS to provide SWM services in their area. Discussions are on and some issues need to be sorted out before matters are finalized.

...Self Help Group

Mr. Lourdusamy along with one of the animators Ms. Sathya attended a training program at H.D. Kote, Mysore organized by Myrada. Inputs on topics like Vision building and Federation of groups was given through lectures and field visits. Capacity building programs are conducted regularly for the group members.

REDS – SKILL TRAINING CENTRE

...53 boys are undergoing training at the STC and 27 boys are attending formal school.

Bro. Arul Jyothi and Bro. Siprian Kiro who were at the STC for a three month exposure left in the in month of August. They participated actively in all the programs and activities.

REDS – RANCHI

A Football tournament was held for the children in the month of August. Separate matches were held for boys and girls. The tournament was held at the Mousibari ground with Fr. Gilbert Barla – principal of Prabath Tara school as Chief Guest. In the boys section Mousibari center were the winners and the boys from Hatia were runners up. The girls from Hatia center won the tournament and Toki Toli were runners up. Trophies and medals were given to the winning teams. Medals were also given to the best players among both boys and girls. Fr. Gilbert was much impressed with the children's games and said that he would like to invite the children to the interschool tournament.

Teacher's Day was celebrated at all the centers. The children put up songs and dance in honour of their teachers.

... Toki Toli Center

80 children attend NFE classes at the center. Families of these children are visited regularly. Tuition for children going to school is regular in spite of the rains. On 18th August a meeting was held with the parents of children from the center, issues like regularity, cleanliness, health, saving and tuition for children going to school were discussed. On 19th a medical camp was conducted and 150 children and their parents participated.

... Doranda Center

70 children are regular for NFE classes at the center. Home visits are usually are done thrice a week to keep in touch with the family. On 26th Aug. A medical camp was organized at the center. Children from the center were taken to Shishu Bhavan to meet with the children there and spend some time with them.

... Mousibari Center

With staff visiting the homes of the children regularly, 70 children come to the center for NFE classes. A Drawing competition was held for the children at the center. On 12th of Aug. a medical camp was held for the children and their parents.

... Khadgarah Center

58 children attend NFE classes every day at the center. In the month of May staff visited the families of children twice.

... Hatia Center

71 children are regular for NFE classes. Meetings are held with the parents of the children .

... Pahari Center

115 children are regular for NFE classes at the center and school. Many new children have been enrolled in the month of July. All of them are ragpickers and are not interested in going to school, yet they are motivated to attend the NFE classes. Children were given clothes and books. Meetings are organized regularly with parents of the children going to school. Bro. Tim from Rome visited the center in the month of September.

... Perna

Training in knitting, tailoring and embroidery is given at the center. Children from the center are motivated to undertake training in one of the vocation skills. As most of the girls are illiterate, literacy classes are taken. Girls at the tailoring section are busy stitching uniforms for children who have been admitted in school this year. There are 24 girls at the Tailoring unit and many more have been enrolled in the month of June, as space is not sufficient for them at the center, the tailoring section has been moved to a different building. There are 21 girls in the embroidery section and 9 girls in the knitting section who are presently undergoing training.

Calendar of Events

2 nd July	Inauguration of center at Madiwala
5 th July the	Under the aegis of the 'Bangalore Forum', a rally was organized to highlight the problem of homeless in Bangalore and a memorandum was submitted to the Mayor on the issue.
7 th July	Staff of Karunalaya – Chennai to visit REDS
9 th July	Medical camp organized for children at Hatia center by the local Government Hospital. 250 children participated.
10 th July	Parents meeting was organized at the Govt. School – Huskur, children and parents participated.
13 th July	Medical camp organized for children at Pahari center. The Good Samaritan Sisters organized the camp.
15 th July	Children from the Doranda center were given injections to prevent night blindness.
16 th July	Medical camp organized for children at Khadghar center. The Good Samaritan Sisters organized the camp.
17 th July	Staff Development workshop was Organised at Deepahalli. Bro. Ray guided the staff through a presentation on the objectives of REDS and the present programs. With a reflection on the strengths of the children REDS works with, he opened avenues on how work could be further improved.
20 th July	Children from Doranda center were taken to visit the JMJ School for an interaction with the children at the school.
21 st July	Visitors from Philippines visit REDS

- 29th July Medical camp organized for children at Mosibari center by the Doctors and nurses of Sadar Hospital.
- 6th Aug Play School & NFE teachers picnic
- 11th Aug Cultural Competition for children from the NFE Centers
- 13th Aug Fancy dress Competition for children from Play Schools
- 15th Aug Independence Day celebration in the areas
- 19th Aug Public Hearing on 'The Right to Health' organized by CHC
- 3rd Sep Awareness program by CHC – Shivajinagar
- 4th Sep Teacher's Day was celebrated in all the centers. Center children danced and sang on this occasion.
- 6th Sep Meeting with NFE and Play school Teachers
- 9th Sep Meeting with parents of Church street children
Awareness program by CHC – Ejjipura
- 10th Sep Meeting with parents of Koramangala area
- 11th Sep New area(Garha Toli) was surveyed for establishment of new REDS center.
- 14th Sep Test for Children at NFE centers
- 15th Sep Seminar especially for women and girls was conducted at Gyan Deep. Dr. Anuja Kacchap was the main speaker. More than 200 women and girls were present for the seminar. Family planning and health was the topic discussed in the seminar.
- 17th Sep Vishwa Karma Puja was celebrated in the center. Girls performed puja on this day and distributed parshadi to all center children and staff.
- 20th Sep Awareness program for women – Madiwala
- 23rd – 24th Training program for street staff on JJA
- 26th Sep Cricket Match was organized at Deepahalli. Boys from the area, STC trainees and Marianist Aspirants participated. The Executive Director Bro. Darwin, Fr. Tony and Fr. Pragasam were the chief guests for the tournament and they gave away the prizes. The day ended with a meal for the boys.
- 28th Sep Six Holy Cross-candidates joined REDS. They have been divided into three groups and will go to Pahari, Toki Toli and Khadgarha center for teaching.
- 30th Sep Drawing competition was organized at Toki Toli center. The winners were given color pencils and sketch pen.