



## HELEN KELLER INSTITUTE FOR DEAF & DEAFBLIND

### ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

#### A glance through this period:

Like every year during this academic year too, the friends and well wishers, the teachers, the management and the students along with their families of Helen Keller Institute worked together to nurture the field of education for the children and young adults with deafness and deafblindness/ MDVI (multiple disability with vision impairment). More number of children were served through our three centers, the vocational centers flourished, the joyful festivities and celebrations filled the children's life with colours, the skills of teachers were improved through various trainings and the faculty of teacher training center worked day and night to prepare the prospective teachers in the best possible way. Some of the highlights of the year are as following:

#### *On the educational front:*

- **The Outreach Center at Chembur:** No. of beneficiaries - currently 10

The small outreach center that we started in July, 2013 in Chembur after doing door to door survey in the neighbouring areas is now well established and has provided quality services through the year to 8 young children who have vision impairment along with additional disabilities. This center runs on three days a week and three teachers provide need based services. A physiotherapist also visits the center once a month to recommend appropriate positions and movements.

Four out of these eight children are wheel chair bound and all of them have a variety of developmental issues. In spite of this , it was a year full of learning as well as fun for all of them. They all have bonded very well with the teachers, have started socialising and participating well in group activities, have much longer attention span, are using their residual vision much more and have grown in all areas of development. Their parents too have received regular guidance regarding the ways in which routine activities can turn into learning opportunities and how to encourage communication and cognitive development in home environment.

- **Outreach program at Byculla served 24 children** (6 months-10 years age group) this session. After an initial developmental assessment elaborate individualised program was made for each of these young ones and systematically followed by three teachers who work here. Each one received 2-12 hours of services per week as per their age and needs. Three of these children are also attending a single disability school and three go to mainstream playschools. We are facilitating learning taking place in the other school as well as working on the need based goals set by us for

each child. Two children between the age of 4-6 whose families have moved to another cities after being with us for more than 2 years , also came back to us at regular intervals for the follow up and further guidelines. These children also received physiotherapy once a week as per their need at our center. An experienced paediatric physiotherapist also visited the center once a week to work with the children in need and provide guidance to the teachers and parents

All the children receiving services here have shown good progress on various fronts. 3 years old Jwalia Sonawala for example has come a long way in the areas of language & communication and cognition. He is now having very meaningful conversation with his teacher as well as others around about a variety of topics , initiates interaction with known people all the time, makes choices , enjoys and participates well in going through tactile story books and enacting those stories, movement and songs, simple pretend play, outdoor visits and so on. His attention span has increased and is able to sit doing different things away for about a couple of hours in spite of having a constant need to move around.

- **The deafblind program at Vashi** too provided a variety of services to **36 children** in the age group of seven months to 18 years. Six teachers worked to enhance the communication, cognitive, motor and social skills of young ones (0-10 age group) using music & play, pre-literacy activities, activities involving manipulative skills, art & craft, group activities and well planned daily living activities.

Seven teachers taught the school age children using the mainstream curriculum adapted to suit their needs. Braille, large print and computer was used as per their potentials and needs. A lot of emphasis was given on language enhancement but the students in their teens also enjoyed their science and social studies topics like human anatomy, development of civilisation, map reading, plant life etc. These topics were taught using tactile teaching material specially prepared by the teachers and computer presentation (for low vision children). Apart from this they were also updated about the current affairs during the time slot for news reading. An important segment of their training included various independent living skills like independent travelling, cooking, shopping, interaction with the people in community with the help of communication cards and so on. We will try our best to take these students upto secondary level. Those who cannot due to sensory, cognitive or medical limitations will be trained in vocational skills after they reach 18. Two of them Ms. Shishna and Naresh have already started spending a couple of hours in vocational center every day in order to be prepared better for this transition.

A third group of students - five of them - who could not go for the academic stream continued to be trained into various routine functional skills like taking care of personal hygiene, dressing up, basic snack preparation and other small house hold

chores, nursery activities etc. They are also being trained in certain pre- vocational skills so that they are better prepared for starting their training in vocational center.

- **The school for the deaf** provided full time school education to **74 children** with deafness this year following the SSC curriculum with the special provisions for the deaf. 8 children have appeared this year in the SSC Board exam - 6 out of this cleared with 1st division. The staff strength is currently 8 fully trained special educators, one art teacher, one craft teacher, one class assistant and one care taker.

Apart from the classroom curriculum children were also encouraged through the year to participate in sports and a variety of cultural activities. They have won many prizes and recognition from well established organisations (pl refer to 'The Cultural Scenario'). Under their modified curriculum they had provision for tailoring and computer education in place of the second language and higher maths. We provided facility for both these subjects and children thoroughly enjoyed attending these classes. An audiologist visited once a week to assess their auditory needs, assist them in acquiring appropriate hearing aids and provide speech therapy.

***News from the vocational centers:*** The main highlights of this year have been -

- Eight young people with hearing impairment/deafness completed their training at the animation center situated at our Byculla center. After the completion of their training all of them were employed either to work as the instructor at Byculla center or at the animation studio owned by their coordinator
- Like every year this year too 6 young adults with deafblindness were trained full time and two were trained part time through the year at different levels keeping their needs and potentials in mind in the following skills-
  - paper bag making
  - necklace and bracelet making using different kinds of beads & stones
  - candle making
  - packing and labelling
  - Nursery activities (watering, pruning, cutting grass using lawn mower etc.)Similarly 8 young adults with deafness were trained in the following trades-
  - artistic jute bag making
  - decorating earthen lamps (diyas) for Diwali & candle stands in novel and unique designs
  - making crocheted pouches and hand bags
  - making wall hangings, pen stands, coasters, colourful and other decorative items

All the items were very well received by the patrons and members of public and big sales were organised through different exhibitions held by corporate houses, banks as well as

social organisations.. The most popular and prestigious one of these exhibitions known as PRATIBIMB' was a 4 days affair organised through the years by Rangoonwala Foundation

- Since last 9 months 'Youth for Job' a Hyderabad based organisation working for rehabilitation of people with disabilities has been conducting 3 months long job oriented training in our partnership at our Vashi premises. In the short span of three months, this training touches a variety of aspects relevant to the current job market like personality development, computer literacy, language skills and so on. The third round of training has just got over and all the people with disabilities who participated in the previous two rounds have already been placed in various jobs.

### ***Human Resource Development:***

- **Teacher Training Center-**

Human Resource development has been a major concern in the field of Deafblindness . Our teacher training course which was started in the year 2000 by Ms. Vacha thus played a pivotal role in filling the gap between the large number of children estimated to be facing dual sensory challenges in our country and the availability of trained professional who could effectively work with them.

- Number of students this year- 33 students (20 in second year and 13 in the first year) from all parts of the country underwent training during this academic session
- Content of training- Extensive theoretical as well as practical hands on training in various aspects of multiple disability with vision impairment was given. Apart from working with the children in our own school they also received practical experience through placements and visits of other programs in Delhi and Mumbai catering to the needs of children with different disabilities. Apart from attending the regular classes, practical lessons and tutorials the trainees were also expected to participate in extra training sessions by planning and conducting recreational sessions with the residential students with deafblindness as well as helping them in routine activities.
- Current staff strength- Apart from the existing training coordinator, one full time lecturer and a full time office assistant, two more staff members-one full time and one part time lecturer- who have been appointed a couple of years back, have been busy taking theory classes, correcting lesson plans and organising practice teaching through the year. 3 staff members of the deafblind school too took classes on various topics. A number of leading professionals from various organisations in the country were invited to teach and inspire the trainees.

SENSE international India, Perkins Foundation and Rangoonwala foundation helped us in meeting the escalated cost of boarding lodging of these teacher trainees.

- **Staff development through various short term courses and in-service training -**
  - . Pushpa Vishwakerma - a teacher working with young children with multiple disability attended a 5 days training organised by SENSE International India in Ahmedabad. The training was on implications of Multi Sensory impairment and intervention strategies.
  - 5 teachers attended a week long workshop on Alternative & Augmentative Communication by experienced professionals from Vidya Sager, Chennai, an organisation known for its advanced work on AAC. The workshop was organised by Perkins Voice & Vision in the month of March , 2015. All these teachers have been immensely benefitted by this workshop and have been using the information received during their work with young children at hKIDB. what they have learnt
  - Three senior staff members, namely Anuradha Bagchi, Sheela Sinha and Aditi Bhonsle participated in a very informative and inspiring workshop on the 'Relationship approach towards working with children with autism and vision impairment.
  - Ms. Rashmi Jadav, Ms. Aditi Bhonsle and Ms. Anuradha Bagchi also attended a three days workshop for senior professionals on sensory integration. The workshop was organised by Perkins Voice & Vision and Mr. Lognathan, a well known paediatric physiotherapist and SI specialist was the trainer
  - Apart from the above mentioned training, our in service training continued through the year. The teachers attending the workshops/ refresher courses came back and passed on the information to other colleagues through workshops, discussions and brainstorming during curriculum planning. There was also constant suggestions and input from experienced colleagues regarding relevant theoretical and clinical facts as well as important but subtle practical issues like selection of interesting and fun filled activities, integrating movement and rhythm in the children's routine through play and music, helping children to initiate interaction with the people around and so on.

- ***Visits by our senior staff members to other parts of the countries as well as to other Asian countries as mentors and consultants:***
  - Ms. Anuradha Bagchi and Ms. Aditi Bhonsle visited SENSE and Perkins- NAB deafblind projects in Nashik, Srirampur, Dhule and Anjangaon as mentors through the year. Dhule and Srirampur are rural projects.
  - Ms. Sheela Sinha visited chittagong, Bangla Desh twice during this academic year as a Perkins consultant- in November, 2014 and again in May 2015 . She worked with the early intervention team of O-Ma-Shishu-Hospital in Chittagong

***Mainstreaming of children with vision impairment and developmental delay:***

We have been making constant efforts to mainstream our young students - both socially and educationally. Apart from helping the family to make their children a part of community and participate in various social events, we also see to it that wherever feasible, they start going to a mainstream school or at least in a single disability program in the pre- school and elementary school stage itself. We continue to provide them with our services in accordance with the requirement in the new program till the child and the parents are fully comfortable in the new set up and the child starts coping with the expectations over there. Often they even come back to us for support after a gap if the family feels that our continued input will help them work better within the new system. This year 5 of our young children started attending another mainstream play school or primary school. With our constant one to one individualised and focussed intervention they had reached a stage where they could participate in a bigger group and take advantage of peer interaction

***Empowerment of families & care takers:***

- Our parent group has started an educational well as vocational program for children and young adults with multidisability. HKIDB provided them space to start and helped them get over the teething issues they faced in the beginning. Later when they found their own space, one of our senior staff members, Ms. Aditi Bhonsle was requested to provide the technical assistance in the initial stage while setting up the center. A couple of our older students too are slowly being integrated into their vocational program. Currently they are a part of both the programs.
- We conducted three one day long workshops on the following topics- for the parents whose children come to Byculla center- a/ how to integrate sensory intervention into the daily routine of the child and understanding some of the commonly seen sensory issues by the physiotherapist Mr. Loganathan b/ Understanding and managing feeding related issues by our special educator Rashmi Jadav c/ enhancing language & communication and cognitive development through the day using play and meaningful and enjoyable routine activities by the Education Director sheela Sinha
- The parents at Vashi center had two days interactive and observation sessions before the school closed for Summer vacation. All the parents participated in their children's classroom activities, satisfied their queries regarding the challenges faced at home,

learnt signs and communication methods and strategies relevant to their children and received simulation experiences . Free arrangements for boarding , lodging for the outstation parents were made by the school.

***The cultural scenario:***

The students of both sections have participated in a variety of extracurricular activities through the year and won several awards and appreciation from all quarters. Some of these events and the details of prizes won are listed below-

- A large group of our deafblind students, teachers and teacher trainees enthusiastically participated in a well publicized WALKATHON, organised by AEHI, a well known ophthalmological medical center in New Mumbai. The event was organised for the purpose of creating awareness about eye donation. Equipped with posters and banners, these young people walked kilometre after kilometre spreading the message ***"Let your eyes see this beautiful world even after you are gone"***. It proved to be very successful and was covered largely by media
- A group of our older students won a trophy in the Sand Castle Competition organised by Lions Club.
- Students of Deaf school actively participated in the ZP sports and won 4 prizes: Swimming : Sheetal Mhatre & Abhijit Barve won 1<sup>st</sup> prize, Arti Singh & Abhijit Barve won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize.
- A dance performance was done by a group of our students at an annual fund raising contest organized by Zumba fitness group. It was very well received and the participants received a number of gifts
- Silent National Anthem enacted by a group of our deaf students remained extremely popular through the year and was performed at Annual functions and musical evenings organised by numerous organisations, business houses and corporate groups
- Volunteers from a number of private sector establishments visited our Vashi and Byculla center through the year, got sensitized by the staff about the needs of people with VIMD and made a variety of teaching learning aids, profiles and posters about for/about our children as per the guidelines provided by our teachers
- Six older deafblind students along with three teachers participated in a fun filled trip to Mahabaleshwar, a small hill city famous for natural beauty and strawberry farming. The tour was organised by Anam Prem, an organisation working for many social causes and coordinated by Mr. Yogesh Desai. The students came back rejuvenated and enriched by the variety of experiences and information that they gained through this trip.

***Assistance in clinical intervention:***

Like every year this year too we have provided assistance to the families in availing medical intervention for their children through the year. Some of the

- Three of our young students were operated upon this year for cataract and squint correction at AEHI - a state of art eye hospital at Vashi with our support and financial assistance
- We continue to get hostel children checked at regular intervals and treated (in case of any ailment) at D.Y. Patil Hospital and other private clinics. Some examples are- Little Parth was taken for a battery of pathological tests and X-Rays on doctor's advice as he had been suffering from persistent bad cough. He had improved a lot by the time the school closed down for the Summer vacation. 13 years old Poonam who was getting severe urine infection also underwent a prolonged treatment before she was sent home for the vacation. Teenage Priyanka needed a detailed gynaecological checkups as well as treatment for a severe stomach infection. All this is being provided to them by the school free of cost.
- Under our group medical insurance scheme, the premium for which is paid by the school, staff members as well as the children from the deaf school have been getting their money reimbursed as and when they have needed some treatment involving hospitalisation

***Financial assistance to parents/guardians through the year:***

We have provided financial support to families of seven children through the year by reimbursing the money they have spent in transporting the children to and fro school. This also includes money spent on outstation travelling of a child and her escort when she went to her native place for the two long vacations. Apart from this we have also provided free boarding lodging to even those local children whose parents/single working parent who cannot afford to bring the child every day from home.

***The structural and environmental modifications:***

- The New Mumbai building had developed major seepage problem which caused a lot of discomfort to us during rainy season. To solve this issue a massive repair work was taken up with the financial support from the House of Birlas
- Taking ahead our **nursery project**, a team from Cactus- a private sector establishment which supports us in maintaining our garden, planted many new flowering plants. Under this project a mini kitchen garden was also made and maintained this year where vegetables like tomatoes and egg plants were planted. Older children learnt about different kinds of plants and how to take care of them through this project. The vegetables grown here were plucked and cooked by the students.



- Work has been initiated to make a new play corner equipped with a variety of play equipments for the children with multidisabilities, keeping their motor, vestibular and pro-prioceptive needs in mind
- On two occasions a large number of volunteers from various private sector undertakings, spent a day with us, painting the classrooms and decorating the lobby walls with murals like those of aquatic animals, generations of Dinosaurs etc.
- Above all our Karjat group home , the work on which had been stopped for a while due to certain logistical issues was completed and inaugurated in the presence of a sizable number of friends and well wishers. It was an immensely happy occasion for all of us as it was another long cherished dream of our founder Ms. Vacha to establish a group home for those deafblind adults who had no place to go.

***Special achievements:***

- Akhter Dhale and Pradip Sinha -two of the deafblind adults who completed their diploma course in Assistive Technology run by us at our Byculla premises, were first appointed as teachers in deafblind section. They proved to be excellent teachers of students in their teens and managed their responsibilities very well. Pradip later moved to Kolkata to be with his family but Akhtar continued. The third trainee Abbas has been appointed as a proof reader cum teacher at our Vashi center. He is a quiet and sincere worker and is blossoming very well and is supporting his family as any other sighted young man.
- ***Our biggest achievement of the year*** has been the appointment of Akhtar Dhale (the young deafblind adult who was working with us as a teacher) as the store supervisor at Goregaon, Mumbai premises of a successful multinational company since 1st May, 2015 . This is the first appointment of a person with dual sensory handicap in India in open market. Another of our trainees Roshan Periera who was a part of our Vocational center for the deaf till now has also been appointed by the same corporate group as a housekeeping supervisor. In both cases our teachers went along with them for initial one month to settle them down in their respective roles and to sensitize his co-worker about their special needs . This can be taken as our biggest achievement of the year. All in all the period of last two years has been extremely productive and symbolises growth on all the fronts.

This has been possible only because of the support and appreciation we received from organisations like yours, donors, medical fraternity and other professionals, and above all volunteers and well wishers. Your support is our strength and we hope that in future too we will continue to do full justice to the trust you all have placed in us.