

Making Inclusive Education a Reality : It is not Just a Formality

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Abstract

Each child is special. It is the responsibility of every citizen to help children realise their potential to the fullest and groom them to be contributing citizens of this country. A special emphasis has been given by SSA to reach out to Children with Special Needs (CWSNs) not only by way of providing ramps, wheelchairs, spectacles, hearing aids etc. but also by providing home based education to those who have severe disabilities. This article throws light on the efforts of the stakeholders in SSA in two districts of Punjab and a private school in Ambala Cantt. Haryana, where the lives of children with multiple physical challenges have changed with the support of their teachers, parents and peers.

The Government of India appreciated Maharashtra its best practices followed for providing Resource Support to Children with Special Needs (JRM July 2008 and State Project Director, Maharashtra). Punjab has also committed to the cause of the CWSNs by giving beyond the formalities of provisions. Other States/UTs are making efforts in moving away from fulfilling a formality to putting exceptional efforts to make IED meaningful. While one is amazed at commitment to CWSNs in Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana and other states/UTs who are working

towards reaching out to every child who has a special need, schools in capital of our country find it difficult to provide meaningful support to dyslexic children!! This is causing great anxiety to these children and their parents (Times of India March 13,09) SSA Punjab is putting in a noticeable effort for the education CWSNs. The case of Ravi and Rinku of Ablawal Village of Patiala may be cited in this regard, which is an example of actually reaching out with a sense of purpose of Inclusive Education Resource Teachers (IERTs) in the district. The special educators have a specific role

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to facilitate in the provision of any and everything that will help these children to be in schools and provide home based education to those children who are totally incapacitated. The discussion with SPD, SSA Punjab in his office, the visit to the District Programme Office of District Fatehgarh Sahib and visits to centres in District Patiala (June, 2008 and February, 2009) made one realise that the State and its functionaries are committed to making every possible effort to make the education of CWSNs meaningful and creative.

Special attention is being given by the State to the education of CWSNs; providing orientation training in *Special Education* following the guide lines of the Rehabilitation Council of India, Delhi to equip teachers for dealing with the CWSNs; is one such initiative among others. IERTs are not only taking care of IED component but also making every effort in



understanding that each child is special and unique. This observation was further supported by field situations in District Patiala especially Resource Rooms for CWSNs located in

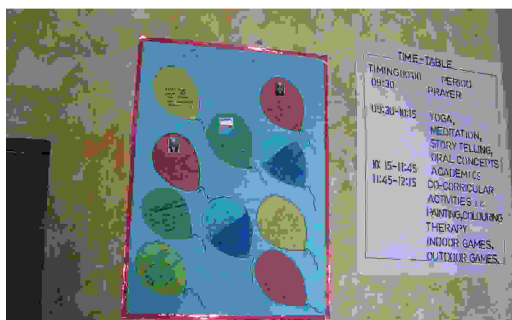
Government Primary School Ablowal, Patiala and in Government Elementary School Yadavindra Colony, all IERTs were committed. In Yadavindra Colony's Resource Room, where a large number of children were deaf and dumb and visually challenged, hugged the IERTs the moment they entered the centre. An interaction with IERTs, CWSNs in both the centres and communities pointed to a feeling of comfort and satisfaction of parents, community members and children who were receiving *Home Based Education* due to severity of their disability.

The IERTs in these centres were creative and often visited each other's centres to share problems and find solutions for each and every child. They do not hesitate in approaching the SPD whenever they run into a problem, which is beyond their purview as they find support every time they approached him for these children.

All, children with special needs in Punjab have been ensured for Rs. One, Lakh with Nirmaya Insurance and Financial Support. The SSA office and functionaries help these children to get a Disability Certificate which they feel will go a long



way to help each child in not only receiving education but later on training as well as jobs. The IERTs have prepared colourful charts to help children in understanding the most beautiful aspects of this is that the IERTs can conveniently converse with every child, no matter what the disability is, the child is dumb or deaf. The IERTs in the centre in Yadindra Colony were extra careful in ensuring that children with low vision were brought out of the room to read and write. This centre has got children with low vision, and children with speech and hearing disability. The IERTs had no complaints that the Resource Centre was not properly lit. They in fact explained that a lot of construction work was going on in the school and therefore they made an extra effort to ensure that their children in the resource room come and went back safely for which they have to do an extra work. **There is a need to ensure proper lighting and toilet facilities.** In this Centre itself a chart entitled "Taare Zamin Par" was put up to give an idea to visitors about the names of the children in the centre along with the challenges/difficulties/disability that



each child suffered from. The IERTs informed that they were able to learn so much from their colleagues, and especially an IERT who himself had low vision. They always approached him for guidance. Ms. Charanjeet Kaur, the IERT of this Centre, had brought a very beautiful bed sheet to cover the table in the centre and arrange the things for the children on it in a practical way to enable their use by children. She took pride in telling us that although this is the last gift to her from her grand mother who is no more. She brought it to the Resource Centre because of these children who are very dear to her.

Organising sport events for CWSNs is a regular feature of SSA Punjab. It had organised *Indo-Pak Sports Meet* for differently-abled children. Five differently-abled children from the District Fatehgarh Sahib won prizes in the Meet. It is amazing how the IERTs work together in coordination to provide support to each one of their colleague as well as to all these children. The video films prepared by



District Patiala of the sports meet as well as by District Fatehgarh Sahib, point to the fact that what a great effort each IERT makes to keep these children

motivated to participate in an exciting and energizing manner.

"Each child is a special gift from God. It is up to us to help them to face life; to make them realise that they make a difference in the world," says Sister Tara, (Principal since 1992), Convent of Jesus and Mary school, Ambala Cantt. Haryana. According to her, children with special needs are special and they need special care to bring out the best in them. They may be denied certain abilities by God but it is the teacher who can help them realise their potential and bring the best out of them.

There are some children studying in this school who are suffering from dyslexia. Sister Tara informed that special lessons are organised to facilitate these children. Their question papers are easier than the normal children and leniency is observed in their promotions to the next classes. With the understanding and the cooperation of the parents and teachers, these children manage well and cope up with the school environment. The principal also shared that there were no dropouts among these children with special needs.

One among them is a child Kritika who is a student of class XI and has multiple physical challenges yet she is courageous and faces the difficulties bravely. She is the only child of her parents. Principal Tara also told that Kritika is a cheerful and lovely child contented with what she has. She helps her companions and is a wonderful child.

Kritika cannot move on her own. Her parents have to shift her from home to school and back from school to home. Even in the classroom she cannot take out the books from her bag. She needs the help of her friends at every moment for using even small articles of daily use. She is fully satisfied with the cooperation of her parents, teachers and peers. The most astonishing fact which came to the notice was that her friends feel obliged to Kritika for the help rendered by her to them.

Kritika even managed to have a number of friends as interacting with some of her classmates, has also helped to know more about herself. One of her classmates Garima is studying with her since class IV and says, "Kritika is a source of inspiration for me. She listens patiently to my problems and helps to sort them out. She is open to solutions for problems of the friends. Kritika is self dependent and always smiles. She has many talents and one can learn a lot from her." Another classmate Harshleen Kaur is also a friend of Kritika. She said that Kritika is not only friendly to her but to everybody else in the class.

She helps her in academics by removing her doubts. Harshleen takes care of Kritika by helping her to move and shift her luggage. She helps her to take drinking water and takes out the books from her bag. She also helps Kritika in studies by removing her doubts if any.

Some of the excerpts of an interaction between Rajinder Singh Mann** and Kritika are as follows;

** Assistant Project Coordinator, Ambala, Haryana

Rajinder: What do you want to be in life?

Kritika: I have no long term plans, yet I wish to qualify 10+2 examination with good marks and get admission in a good college.

Ques: What profession would you like to join?

Ans : I want to join MBA, Journalism or Law.

Ques: How many marks did you get in 10th class examination?

Ans : I got 91 % marks.

Ques :Do you get full support from your friends, teachers and parents?

Ans : Yes, I get full support from all of them.

Ques :Are there any difficulties faced by you in your daily routine? If any, who comes to your help first of all?

Ans : No difficulties as teachers, friends and parents all are helpful. She tells an episode from her life when she was with her friend named Gunjan Khanna. The electric fan was faulty and it got heated. The plastic melted and dropped down on her friend. But Gunjan Khanna did not care the pain and did not leave me alone. She remained with her friend. I even did not show her injuries to me so that I may not feel depressed or sad.

Ques :How do you feel at the help offered by others?

Ans : I feel lucky to have supportive behaviour of the Principal, teachers of Convent of Jesus and Mary School, Ambala Cantt.

Ques: What are your expectations from the friends, teachers and government for further help?

Ans: I have no expectations. It would be wrong on my part to have all my wishes and expectations fulfilled from the government. I don't know.

Ques: What do you feel when other children play? What would you like others to do for you?

Ans: I feel happy. My friends are always with me. I enjoy with them indoor. We discuss things.

Ques: Are you happy with your life?

Ans: Very happy. I have no regrets (She was actually smiling).

Ques:What is your message to children like you who need the help of others?

Ans: I would like to suggest them to accept life as it is. God created something special in everybody. All of us should make use of the opportunities which are available.

Ques: What is your message to the teachers?

Ans: "I would not comment because they teach us".

Ques: Who is your best friend in your class?

Ans: The whole class is my friend. I don't have any best friend in particular.

Ques: Is there any specific difficulty faced by you?

Ans : I don't think there is any. My life is running smoothly.

The commitment of the teachers, classmates and support of the peer group made Kritika overcome all her difficulties with confidence. Her positive attitude gets encouragement from everyone around her.