

July 2011

Greetings from Karm Marg Family!!

The relentless summer is over and we are now enjoying the cool monsoon breeze and rain. Life is back to the everyday routine after the summer holidays.

This is a good time perhaps to review the last few months and share our journey with you, our larger family.

On the education front...

Come April, our children began their new school term with full sprit. School results were good for everyone, but unfortunately Ruby failed her Class X examination. She was obviously bitterly disappointed but after talking to the Karm Marg Counsellor, Veena and other senior colleagues she decided that she wanted to continue her education through the National Open School and also do some vocational training on the side. Ruby is 17 years old and understands that she has to become independent and stand on her feet soon. Since she is also interested in teaching younger kids, she has started teaching some young children of Khedi village, which is adjacent to the Karm Marg care home. This way she will be able to earn some seed money too.

We are paying extra attention to senior school kids studying at Government Schools. As is true for many young adults there is a gap between their perceived career expectations and reality. We have taken on Navneet a Karm Marg well-wisher of many years, as a consultant counsellor. Besides being in regular contact with the children and school teachers, she is also in contact with all staff members who are taking care of the children education at the Care Home. This ensures that appropriate and individual child-centred guidance is given to the children. Navneet will also be helping Karm Marg and the older children look at career options for each individual child depending on their aptitude and interest. She will plan specific vocational and life skill training programmes for them.

Learning and sharing through networking.....

In early April, Veena attended the *Learning Society Conference* in Beer, Himachal Pradesh. She met with many interesting groups and individuals working in areas like organic farming, alternative education methodologies and product design and development for sale etc. On her return many of the new ideas were discussed with colleagues at Karm Marg and will be incorporated into Karm Marg's programmes.

Veena also met with an excellent group working in the area of non-violent communication. They have agreed to conduct workshops on this issue in Karm Marg later in the year.



Summer fun....

We have always used the summer holidays as an ideal time to work at a somewhat deeper level with the children at the Care Home. Without the pressure of going to school and homework, this is a time when they can immerse themselves in learning new skills. The long workshops sessions helps the internalisation of learning process, which finds deeper roots within them.

In May, as part of this exercise we organised a "Healthy Cooking Workshop' which was conducted by Manoj who was trained at one of our partner organisation called Shikshantar, in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

The children learnt that by making small changes they could eat much healthier food. They enjoyed taking part in the workshop thoroughly but were a bit resistant to making the changes in their usual food. As part of follow-up we have had to conduct many informal sessions to help the children understand the long-term benefits of a healthier lifestyle. After the workshop, we have developed a weekly menu with the new recipes and the cooking methodology to ensure that we eat well.

We also conducted a similar 2-day cooking workshop in our office for friends of Karm Marg who were interested in this issue. 15 friends who joined us on both the days said that they had a great time learning, cooking and eating.

Sumi ji, a freelance Counsellor that Veena met in Beer also joined us during this period in May and spent 10 days with the children at the Care-home. Her warm, wonderful skill of interacting and working with the emotional side of children made her the most popular counsellor we've ever had. Very gently she helped the children discover and explore their strengths and weaknesses. And took them down the path of how they can enhance their strengths and transform their weaknesses. She has had a very positive impact on almost all the children and we have in fact invited her to come and spend a month with us later in the year.

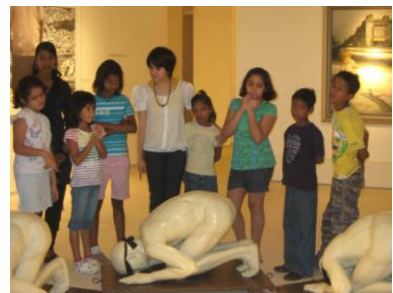
We took the primary school going children (5-10 Year olds) for a week long art workshop conducted by Art 1st at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in Delhi . They had a great time exploring different art techniques, paper collage, mosaic, paints, drawing, and story drawing. They also learnt about Henry Matisse.

Besides enjoying the workshop, they also loved to go into the Museum, which they did, everyday after the workshop. They had many thoughts and questions about each exhibit, which they put to the resident curator, who answered each query patiently. She told us later that she was amazed at their out-of-the box perspectives and interpretations of simple and complex themes.

We also invited the NAZ foundation training team to conduct a 'Sexual Health and Aids Awareness" workshop with all our staff members and children. In the children's workshop, boys and girls were separated, so that they could discuss sexual health and other related issues freely. The staff found it very useful and a follow up session is being planned to focus specifically on nutrition, medication and emotional handling of children with HIV+ and other children as well.

In the summer we also had Ankur, a theatre and creative writing facilitator from Kolkata spend a month with the children doing a theatre workshop . Ankur managed to inspire the children to come up with their own small sketches and stories. He then helped them gel all this together to put up a 40 minute final production. The most exciting part of the workshop was that Ankur involved the children with special needs as well and together they put up an excellent

performance for about 40 friends of Karm Marg. We're hoping to perform some pieces of this production at our 15th year celebration next year.



And now about our fantastic summer holiday generously sponsored by Mukti Foundation...

This year we organised a trip to Manali a hill station in Himachal Pradesh. The children had a wonderful time away from the mundane routine. They had lots of fun going on nature walks, trekking, camping, doing yoga., This was also a great time for them to spend one-on-one quality time with Veena and Navneet, It was a time to introspect and discover more about each other and themselves. The highlight of the trip was the feedback from the campsites managers who

showered our kids with so many compliments and told us that they had never met with such a lively, vibrant and talented group of children before.

The whole group came back energized and ready to take on the next quarter of school and a more focussed approach to thinking about their future plans.



Some more happenings...

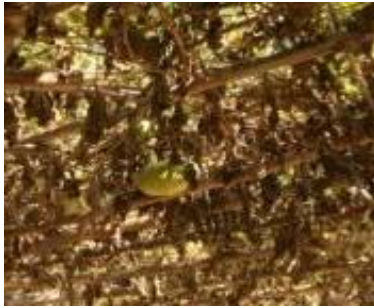
Our gardeners and older children have put in a lot of effort in our kitchen garden. We are using organic farming techniques and have grown potatoes, tomatoes, gourds, pumpkins, okra, leafy greens etc. New recipes are being sought every week to make use of the bumper crop.

Ashu, one of the children at Karm Marg, participated in an orientation programme to get admission into Swaraj University to learn film making. We are happy to report that he has been selected and has already started his year- long journey with them.

Last year, at the insistence of Ram Lal (name changed) one of our children (aged 14) who has been with us for many years, we took in his younger brother and sister (aged 7 and 4). Ram Lal had been very concerned about his siblings because his parents used to send them to beg and earn money to meet their (the parent's) drug and alcohol addiction. He also wanted Karm Marg to give his parents a job, so that they did not have to depend, on their young children. We explained to Ram Lal that we couldn't do that because besides the fact that there was no vacancy, it would create a precedent that we will not be able to sustain. The parents visited Karm Marg, and let the younger children stay back at Karm Marg.

In April, we've had three new children join our family. Saurabh, Manu and Kundan. Saurabh and Manu (a child with special needs) have been referred to us by the NAZ Foundation and are also staying with us. Kundan has also settled in well. In July, two more kids, Jeete and Aman joined the Karm Marg family but were unable to adjust and ran away within 10 days and also convinced Ram Lal's younger brother to run away with them.

Such events though very rare, shake us to our core. . After many anxious hours we did manage to find all the three children and got them back to their guardians. Incidents such as these take their toll on the organisation like they would in any family. All the children at the care-home get involved with the problem/situation and become a part of the anxiety and worry. It takes a lot of conversations, counselling, reassuring through many days, to get things back to normal. As a friend of Karm Marg said, "Taking care of the emotional, physical, psychological needs of 2 children in a nuclear family is such a challenge, how do you take care of 58 children?" All we can say to that is that it is not easy ...there are no manuals or handbooks that we can consult and certainly no magic wand.



Search for another model.....

The quality of education offered by the private primary schools where are little ones go is increasingly becoming a cause of great concern to us.

In particular, we are concerned about the fact that the 5-8 years olds who are at Karm Marg are children who have usually been through emotional trauma and in some cases, physical abuse too. They are the most vulnerable and therefore need tremendous emotional and psychological support, which unfortunately the private schools are not able to provide. We have tried to look for a full time primary school teacher to teach our children but have been unsuccessful so far. We have been able to identify a school which is much more expensive but is willing to provide special remedial education to our children. We are also exploring starting our own primary school eventually, where we can also take in children from the local village near Karm Marg.

Issues of Sustainability...

As we grow older, we see the need to make certain changes in the way we function. To lay strong roots we had to work very hard to build systems, where care, compassion, commitment to children and taking care of their physical, emotional and psychological needs was paramount.

For greater sustainability we realise that we need to undertake to work towards semi professionalizing the organisation so that no dependencies are created on any one individual.

The process of organisational re-structuring has started in Karm Marg. We are working with some individuals and board members who have had many years of experience in this area. These are so far baby steps but which will in the months ahead find surer ground. We have been working on strategy planning for fund raising, strengthening documentation, working on issues related to long term self sustenance, formalising salary structures and job descriptions, etc. The objective of this is to allow a smooth transition to a new leadership.

Jugaad Update....

We are trying our best to decrease our dependency on funding by donors and are making every effort to make Jugaad self-reliant. The objective is that the profits from Jugaad will one day support Karm Marg financially a hundred percent. To increase our range of products as well as increase our production capacity, we have on board Guneet, a design graduate, who is helping us in both these areas... Swati Singh also is ably helping us from NIFT (National Institute of Design), Delhi, who is doing a 6-week internship with us.



Jugaad has also started selling some of its products online through E-bay, India. Also, starting from August and right through March of next year, Jugaad will be showcasing its products at various exhibitions all over India. .

The peace in our hearts, the beautiful rainy weather and the greenery around us will hopefully tide us over the next few months as the excitement of Diwali and the festive season starts taking over.

Till then, we wish you all love and happiness

The entire Karm Marg family !!!