



THE UTTOR CHANDIPUR COMMUNITY SOCIETY
Registered under the West Bengal Registration of Societies Act XXVI, 1961 No: S/IL/ 30133 2005-6

Activity Report April 2007 – March 2008

Suchana works in six villages in Birbhum, West Bengal, with a mixed community of Santals, Koras and Bengali and Bihari Hindus. The organisation runs two projects: the Early Learning Group, which supports the literacy and educational development of the government school children; and a Health Project which offers health information and helps people access local health services.

The Early Learning Group

Suchana runs an Early Learning Group (ELG) to facilitate underprivileged children, especially Santals, Konras and girls, in accessing quality education. We have 138 children at present, who also attend the local government primary schools and middle school.

The ELG meets three times a week on Sundays and Wednesdays and Fridays. On Sundays and Wednesdays the younger children are taught Bengali (literacy), Maths (numeracy) Singing; and Dance through a mixed medium of languages (Bangla, Santali, Konra). Older children are also taught English, Environmental Science and Creative Writing (Bengali). Six paid teachers and three voluntary teachers conduct these sessions. All children take part in art and craft activities every Sunday. Suchana also runs a library for the ELG, so children can access and take home a variety of children's literature in Bangla and English.

This year, the ELG began an important 'remedial' programme during ELG sessions. As class groups have expanded, as in many schools, teachers have increasingly had to cope with a broad ability range in one class, with the result that the children who learn more slowly have not always received the attention they need and deserve. In April 2007, we identified children from each class group whose needs were not being adequately met, and began short one-to-one reading sessions with these children. On the whole, these are children who have no possibility of individual attention around education at home. Seeing some relatively quick results in terms of improved reading, this initiative was intensified in October and now involves nearly all Suchana teachers and 20 children at different points in their ELG routine.

Every Friday afternoon, the ELG meets for sports and games. Two games teachers - one male, one female – conduct these sessions.

Health Work

Suchana has two health workers: a qualified homeopath and an assistant trainee health worker. This team visits the villages twice a week to attend to minor illness, initiate health awareness ideas, and organise referrals to the hospital when necessary. The health workers also visit the Kamalakantapur government primary school and the anganwadi on a regular basis, for health check-ups and basic treatment. The health team arranges health camps twice or thrice a year, when doctors from the sub-divisional hospital or elsewhere are present to advise and prescribe. Once a year, an eye doctor is arranged for refraction testing. The ELG children have all had refraction tests.

Suchana has a small health library, where villagers can access resources and information on health and nutrition.

Executive Committee

Suchana's Executive Committee, made up of 13 people from Suchana's villages and two people from nearby villages, has a majority of adivasi members and a majority of women members. The Committee meets at least once every two months to discuss ideas and make decisions. Meetings are minuted. An Annual General Meeting is held in May every year.

Support to Government school

Suchana works in co-operation with the Government schools. It offers support to the primary school in Kamalakantapur by paying a Bengali dance teacher to offer an extra-curricular dance programme at the school once a week. It also helps with the schools' vegetable garden initiative, started to help increase the nutritional content of the Midday Meals Scheme, by paying a gardener one day a week, and paying for ploughing and seeds.

Additional Activities

In addition to these regular activities which take place throughout the year, Suchana has conducted a number of additional initiatives:

The Early Learning Group

April 2007: The ELG took 24 new admissions in April 2007, mostly of pre-school age, bringing our numbers to 138. To prepare for this, Rajeshwari Kora was employed as a pre-school teacher; issues about working with pre-school children were discussed in a parent/guardian half-day workshop; the ELG was divided into six class groups; a new routine was prepared; and a curriculum for the new session was discussed and prepared in a 2-day teachers' planning workshop.

A follow-up library workshop was also held, to put in place a new system for issues and returns and to make the open-access system manageable for younger children.

The Health Project conducted a 2-day reproductive health workshop for adolescent girls and newly married women. 24 people attended the workshop.

May 2007: Taposh Majhi, a teacher at the Kamalakantapur school, began working as a voluntary supplementary English teacher at the ELG's Sunday sessions.

The health team facilitated 10 pterigium operations at Sian subdivisional hospital, and conducted follow-up work to identify and treat post-operative problems.

June 2007: The ELG has annual holiday for the month of June. Seven teachers went to Loreto, Sealdah in Kolkata for a 10-day training in low-cost child-centred teaching for Class 1 and 2 levels.

July 2007: Efforts were made to implement skills and ideas learned in the teacher training into the ELG's teaching approach. This included the teaching of English and Bengali songs and introducing a range of TLM made by the trainees during the training into teaching sessions.

An art project was started in which all ELG children will fabric-paint designs on their own cloth school bag, which will be used for library books and other Suchana learning materials.

The health team conducted a TB-identification survey. Sputum tests were carried out for at-risk families. Positive results were followed up with further tests at the sub-divisional hospital. 2 patients were identified who had not previously had TB treatment. These were linked up with the DOT programme for treatment.

August 2007: ELG classes 2-5 went to see 'The Wizard of Oz' showing at a local film centre, courtesy of the Bikshan Film Club.

The health team helped the access of a patient who had been diagnosed with cerebral worms to Bardhaman hospital for treatment. They also supported the treatment and care of an adolescent suffering acute depression, via doctors in Bolpur.

September 2007: The ELG classes 2-5 visited a local theatre where children from Shishutirta, a nearby orphanage, were performing dramas in Bengali and English.

The health team identified a leprosy patient who had stopped treatment due to a severe adverse skin reaction from regular leprosy drugs. In discussion with the leprosy unit at Sian sub-divisional hospital, an alternative treatment was prescribed and the treatment was successfully followed.

October 2007: Before Durga Puja, the ELG children were presented with the cloth library bags which they had individually painted, and a photograph of themselves. The annual evaluation, based on class progress and contributions, was prepared and distributed to all ELG children.

Bengali dance classes were started once weekly at the Kamalakantapur primary school.

November 2007: A parent/guardian half-day meeting was held, to discuss student's evaluations, to discuss and communicate the ELG's methods and objectives, and raise and parental concerns or comments.

Meetings were also held to finalise decisions and preparations for the purchase of a 1-bigha plot of land on which to build a community-run Education Resource Centre and clinic, to be developed out of the existing ELG and Health Project.

December 2007: A 1-bigha plot of land next to Uttor Chandipur village was purchased by Suchana. Basic plot markings were put in place, and two meetings held to discuss building objectives, and the building process.

A group of teachers traveled to Kolkata to represent Suchana and sell Suchana's greetings cards – designed by the ELG children – at the Kolkata International School Christmas Fair. The teachers also operated a rota-system to represent Suchana and sell greetings cards over three days at Santiniketan's Pous Mela.

January 2008: In January the ELG suspended its regular teaching routine and began an experimental routine for teaching new activities in preparation for the Annual Function, to be held in February. New activities, for which smaller groups of children were co-ordinated, included Santal dance; Kora dance; Hindi dance; English country dance; gymnastics; and a variety of song groups. Teachers prepared and directed short dramas to be performed by class groups III (Bengali); IV (Bengali) and V (English), and a play on the functional value of education was prepared. Art and craft work including paintings, drawings, clay work, paper mache work; clay flutes etc. were prepared for display. 2 workshops were held by a local student to show class V children a simple technique for firing terracotta work. The children then conducted their own firing of their work.

The ELG conducted their Annual Sports Day, combining individual races with team events, and including events for parents and teachers. 130 children and several parents participated.

Meetings continued on the design of the new building, and discussion of the function of the proposed Education Resource Centre. Committee members and teachers went on a group tour of interesting private and community buildings around Santiniketan, to facilitate the Suchana building planning.

February 2008: Children selected from classes II, III and IV for their lack of previous opportunities participated in a special paper collage workshop, a joint initiative by Suchana and two other local organisations. This and other work were then presented at an exhibition of children's art held in Santiniketan. The children who took part in the workshop were taken to see the exhibition. An impromptu workshop was also held with class IV and V children on making terracotta flutes.

The Annual Function was held at the end of February, a three-hour programme in which every ELG child participated in at least two contributions to the programme. It was attended by approximated 500 visitors: parents, guardians, other villagers, friends, visitors from Santiniketan and Kolkata.

The health team facilitated 4 cataract operations at Sian sub-divisional hospital.

March 2008: Suchana went on its annual picnic and educational trip. All the children were given a tour of the pottery and ceramic production process at Confetti, Daranda. A teacher from Kala Bhavan, Vishwa Bharati conducted a workshop for class V children on responses to the art work of Rabindrath Tagore.

Plans for the Education Resource Centre building were finalised, and a meeting held to schedule the building process.