

Mathru Educational Trust for the Blind, Bangalore, India.

The Central New Jersey (CNJ) chapter has been supporting Mathru since 2004 with annual grants. We have also collaborated with them in projects for the blind with Carnegie Mellon University in developing a computerized Braille Tutor; and supported Mathru in their expansion to serve the underprivileged disabled.

This report is a record of the involvement of the CNJ chapter with Mathru since 2003; and hence, a record of the development and progress of Mathru. An extended "site visit and progress report", if you will, covering a period of about ten years.

I have been in Bangalore continuously since June 2011. And in this period, I have visited and spent time at Mathru School and the new Center – many times. So, this is a composite of observations made and information gathered over six months.

Asha CNJ's involvement with Mathru began in 2003. At that time, Mathru was located in the Yelahanka area of Bangalore in a small 2 Bedroom rented house. There were about twenty children there with a few teaching and associated staff for support. Ms. Muktha, the founder of Mathru was in charge of everything. During this initial visit I saw a 5-year-old blind boy walk down a flight of steps, go around a winding path in the backyard garden and reach the dorm, confidently and with a smile! The older children conversed with me in English. I watched them play musical instruments and sing. I played cricket and chess with them! If this was an example of what Mathru could do for blind children, who just a few years ago were growing up in villages to helpless, poor, uneducated laborer parents – I had no doubt in my mind that, this is the type of project Asha has set out to help.

Mathru Blind School

In 2006 Mathru built and moved to the present school building – designed by the environmental Architect Chitra Rao. A building that has and continues to impress visitors; impeccably maintained by the ninety plus students and staff who live on the premises. In 2010 Mathru School successfully accomplished its original goal of becoming a free Residential High School for blind girls and boys.

The school has 82 residential students (30 girls & 52 boys). Besides the government prescribed curriculum, the children are taught Music, Sports, Elocution, Drama and other activities. They give public performances and participate in competitions in Bangalore and have won numerous awards and prizes.

Teaching Staff:

- 16 - Headmistress and 9 teachers;
- 1 instructor each for Computer, Physical Training and Dance lessons and
- 3 for music and instrumental lessons.

Administration:

- 5 - Includes a Manager and an accountant.

Support:

- 7 – Hostel Warden, cooks, cleaners and watchmen.

Results:

2009:

- 7 students graduated. 4 girls, 3 boys.
- 3 girls are going to College on their own. 1 at home.
- 2 boys going to college (supported by Mathru). 1 employed.

2010:

- 7 students graduated. 1 girl, 6 boys.
- 1 girl going to college (supported by Mathru).
- 2 boys going to college (supported by Mathru).
- 4 boys going to college on their own.

Awards:

- State award for The Best School – 2009

Awards for Ms. G.R. Muktha

- Canara Bank award for Services to Society – 2009.
- State award for Services to Blind – 2006.
- Guild of Women Achievers Award for contributing in providing education to blind children – 2002.

On the Annual Day, the parents are invited to the school function – expenses paid by Mathru. For me, one of the most moving experiences was seeing the parents go up to the podium with their child to receive prizes – beaming with pride and some with tears of joy in their eyes!

Mathru is active in the community and has conducted eye camps in the rural areas. Mathru is an active participant in activities and observances held for the disabled in the area.

In the years 2004 to date, Ms. Muktha has been constantly looking into how else Mathru could help the disabled. What could be done for the students once they finish High School? How do blind students going to colleges in Bangalore with Government aid manage? How about children who are blind and have other disabilities as well? And the deaf and dumb segment? Would what was learnt in establishing the Mathru Blind School help the other disabled as well? The answers to some of these questions, based on trials conducted over time at the School, resulted in the new Mathru Centre for the Disabled.

Mathru Centre

Mathru, with encouragement from its supporters, started construction of the new centre in 2009. It was inaugurated and occupied in August 2011. The Centre is built on one acre of land allotted by the Karnataka Government to Mathru. It is located 7 kms from the Mathru School for the Blind.

The Mathru Centre as of date, has functioning facilities for

- Vocational Training for literate and non-literate Blind
- Educating Multiple Sensory Disability (MSD) children
- Educating Deaf and Dumb children
- Hostel for College going visually disabled students
- A residence for blind, destitute women will be added when funds permit.

The concept for the Centre and its multiple service components was developed based on Mathru's experiences, practices and testing at the Blind School.

1. Two separate vocational training sessions for the blind and disabled – literate and non-literate – were held in 2009/2010 at the Blind School. These two sessions gave Mathru the experience and confidence to plan similar training sessions in the Mathru Centre.
2. Children with Multi Sensory disabilities are visually impaired with one or more non-visual sensory disabilities, such as hearing, speech, or other s disabilities resulting from mental retardation, autism etc. To help these children, and separately for the deaf and dumb, Mathru started classes for the two segments at the Blind School in 2010. The success of these classes gave Mathru the know-how and ability to continue the classes at the Mathru Center.
 - a. Class strengths at the Centre to date:
 - i. MSD students (Residential): Girls – 4, Boys – 2.
 - ii. MSD students (Non-Residential): Girls – 1, Boys – 2.
 - iii. Staff: 2 qualified teachers with special skills.
 - b. Deaf & Dumb Students:
 - i. Girls – 1,
 - ii. Boys – 5,
 - iii. Staff: 1 qualified special teacher.
3. A few years earlier, college going blind students from the outlying areas and districts started appealing to Mathru for accommodation while attending colleges in the city. Recognizing the validity and severity of the problems faced by these students, Mathru has just started a hostel for 50 college going blind students at the new Centre. There is an associated kitchen and dining facility. *Residents:* Girls – 6, Boys – 8.
4. Mathru also plans to include in the Centre, living accommodation and board for five destitute blind women – who, while living at the Centre, will help run and maintain it. There will also be living quarters for the staff at the centre.

5. The Centre has three main buildings - the Hostel, the building for the MSD and deaf and dumb children's classrooms, the vocational training centre and a library and computer learning centre and the building housing the dining room and kitchen. These buildings enclose a spacious garden, common areas and a children's playground.
6. The Centre is supported by:
 - 1 Warden,
 - 1 Cook,
 - 1 Cleaner and
 - 1 Watchman

The relevant staff located in the School does the administrative work of the Centre.

New projects starting in March 2012

1. Summer camp- vocational training and computer education
2. Special classes for 10th standard students (disabled and/or underprivileged, studying in nearby government schools)
3. Spoken English classes for under privileged local children.
4. Tailoring, embroidery, knitting classes for under privileged women.

These four projects will be located at the new Centre and will be available to the local community.

Mathru's Strengths (based on my observations over the years):

- Qualified teachers and staff
- Good infrastructure and facilities
- Volunteers – Retirees, students, corporate employees and professionals such as Doctors, Educational and Financial consultants.
- Efficient organization, administration and record keeping.
- Donors (finance, time and services) – Individuals, Institutions, Corporations, NGO's, Indian and foreign.
- Good networking and relations with the public, media, government (local, state and national) and other like institutions and associations.
- Most importantly, genuine concern for the blind and other disabled.

I conclude this report with a message from Ms. Muktha, the Founder and driving spirit behind Mathru:

"This earth has given us life, resources and the capabilities to build, improve and share many wonderful, beautiful things. A loving vision and our attitudes and actions can transform our world into one where there is harmony among the haves and have-nots. The community at large has to get involved and consider it a sacred duty to support someone, anyone, suffering for no fault of his or hers. Mathru is attempting to make a difference in the life of the disabled by providing

them with education, training, life skills and the confidence to lead a life with dignity – without being a burden on their families and society. Mathru started with visually disabled children and is expanding its services to adults and the multi sensory disabled.”

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February 2012.

Update as of Aug 1, 2012:

In 2012 Mathru was selected as a Study Centre by the CBR (Community Based Rehabilitation) India Network and the RCI (Rehabilitation Council of India). The purpose of the study centre is to train teachers for the disabled. There is a severe shortage of trained, qualified teachers in India. Bangalore University (BU) is also part of this effort and offers certified courses in the education of children with special needs, a special education degree (B.Ed.) course for teaching visually challenged, hearing impaired and mentally retarded students, and courses in Community Based Rehabilitation planning and management. These courses are recognized by the RCI. The CBR Network in close coordination with BU and RCI has streamlined procedures for conducting the courses. Detailed instructions are given by the CBR Network according to which the trainee teachers are trained. Well-designed training and study materials are provided by CBR. Highly competent special educationists and resource personnel are provided by CBR and/or BU for the Study Centre.

The selection of trainees who undergo teachers training programs at the Study Centers is also well regulated. Prospective students are screened for qualifications and competency prior to being registered for training at the Study Centers.

Mathru was selected as a Study Center based on visits by CBR and RCI representatives to approve infrastructure, facilities and resources at Mathru and their record over time.

Registered candidates sent to the Mathru Study center will be offered free accommodation and food as needed. Mathru will conduct periodic tests and the final qualifying exam. Regular reports on the progress of trainees will be sent to BU.

On the 6th of June 2012 Mathru conducted special “add on” courses for those teachers who will be required to educate mentally retarded children. 42 teachers from all over India attended this course. Again on 16th July 2012, 72 trainee teachers from all over Karnataka State have come to Mathru for the 7 day “Inclusive Education Program”.

Mathru is now becoming a nodal point for educating visually challenged, hearing impaired and multisensory children and a qualified Center for training teachers to properly educate the disabled in Karnataka and India.