

Mathru Blind School Visits Report - January 2010

Having been in India since June 2009-mostly in Bangalore- I have visited Mathru Blind School on numerous occasions. A number of these were impromptu visits. I have also visited the rented premises where Mathru is maintaining a hostel for college level blind students from outside Bangalore and interacted with the students. I have seen the site of the future building that Mathru will be constructing for a vocational training center, hostel for blind college students and later, a home for destitute blind women. I have been shown the Architects plan for the building. The ground-breaking (*Bhoomi Pooja*) ceremony is scheduled for January 28, 2010. Attached is the brochure developed in Nov 2009 giving all details of the new project. Mathru's own 2009 half yearly report is also attached. I have reviewed their 2009 report and can vouch for its contents. Since their report has given all the verified facts and numbers, the rest of my report will be more on impressions and hopes. A list of recent significant achievements is attached.

Mathru School is located in Newtown, Yelahanka - an area of Bangalore, near the new International Airport. The school is on land given to Mathru at a subsidized rate by the city, and surrounded by high-rise apartment buildings. These buildings are of conventional design and wear a weathered look. Mathru School's architecture and appearance is a refreshing contrast. Small, well maintained gardens are outside the school.

When you walk into the school, a chalkboard lists the special events for the day. On the right is a small office for the newly hired Administrator, Hemalatha. A full time Administrator is a necessity since the activities of Mathru have increased substantially, and the founder Ms. Muktha spends a significant amount of her time in Public Relations, networking

and soliciting for funds. A visually impaired blind receptionist is at the desk. She invariably recognizes me from the sound of my footsteps! On the right is a big conference hall where vocational training classes were held last year. As you turn left, on the entrance wall is Mathru's heartfelt acknowledgement of Asha for Educations' continuing help over the years: the school is named the Asha School. To the left again is the large dining room and spotless kitchen with polished stainless steel equipment. The children, teachers, and staff share meals in this hall. Outside the dining room, the walls have been decorated by volunteers with paintings and sayings, mostly from Helen Keller and other world thinkers and doers. There are some classrooms at this, the ground level; along with the Trust office with a full time employee who is a computer professional and manages the databases, correspondence, the Braille printer and other computer related work. A well-wisher in Sydney, Australia designed the brochure for the new project - attached- and Mr. Shiva Kumar at the computer coordinated in the layout and preparation of the same. He maintains the website: www.mathrublindschool.org. Next to this office are a lounge and the professional recording studio. All the furniture and all the equipment in the school are mostly donated. The recording studio was a donation, which included training a visually impaired Mathru teacher to operate the studio. Mathru now produces CDs and cassettes to help the education of its own students as well as blind adults, where possible. A few steps above, midway up the stairs is a meeting room where visitors and volunteer teachers can teach spoken English, special subjects, general knowledge or just interact with the children. At basement level is the computer room with 10 computers all equipped with Jaws Software for the blind. And a Braille printer - donated - where now, Mathru with the help of volunteers, prints Braille textbooks for their students, along with books for the library. At the next level are more classrooms and the two dormitories. Each dormitory can accommodate 50 children -

one for girls and the other for boys. The staff also sleep there as warden/caretakers. There are sufficient equipped baths for the children. Instead of cots, the children use bedrolls; and each student has a locker for personal belongings. Here again the rooms are spotless – maintained by the students. The next level is the terrace. One half is open; and in the other half there is a laundry with washers – all donated. This year's addition is another big covered hall where the children interact and play during their free time. This hall also has the library and a physiotherapy room. There is also a separate furnished room with attached bath for visitors. The construction of all these rooms was made possible by specific donations.

An environmental architect originally designed the Mathru building. It's airy, full of light and aesthetically pleasing. No allowances have been made for the children's' disability – in preparation for their entry into the real world. The building, now about 5 years old, is well maintained and clean. It's run efficiently. And it is remarkable that even though it teaches and houses about 90 young students and about 20 staff and teachers, the atmosphere is quiet, yet cheerful. It is a happy place!

I have been with Mathru since 2004 – when it had less than thirty students in a three-room house with tin and concrete block sheds. In 2010 it will have successfully attained its original goal of being a free residential school for 100 under privileged blind children. It is now taking on the challenge of preparing the children and others like them for securing an independent lifestyle by giving them vocational training, higher education and the opportunity for employment. This will surely complement Asha's own goal of universal education and answer the question we Asha volunteers constantly ask – after an education, how will the children survive?

I would encourage paying particular attention and action in response to Mathru's attached half yearly report Part E, items 3,5 and 8. And a personal request to Asha volunteers in our chapter - or any other - to visit Mathru and write reports, which hopefully are refreshingly different than mine! I have attached a few comments from other visitors.

Mathru has been one of our chapters' most successful projects. They have lived up to their promises and even exceeded them. They are taking the next logical steps to insure a secure future for the blind. They deserve our, and indeed, the help of other Asha chapters. Their plans for the future are both exciting and ambitious and involve continuing education. I strongly support giving a grant of \$10,000 for them in 2010 to cover their 2010 administrative expenses. In addition, if funds permit, we should choose (from the attached brochure) a facet of their new project/building for at least an equivalent amount.

Success needs to be rewarded and sustained.

Rana Nanjappa
2010

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