

# Visit to Asha Deepa School for the Blind, Bidar

**Date:** 7th Apr 2007

We (myself from Asha Hyderabad, Ram from Asha Bangalore, Govind from Asha UP) started from Hyderabad bus stand at 7:30 AM and reached Bidar at around 12 PM and called Sanju. Sanju picked up and we went to the school. The school is around 4 km from the nearest Bus stop (Naya Kamaan) before Bidar's main bus stop.

The school is a concrete building (not with pillars) with four rooms. We are introduced to Dileep, brother of Sanju and also visually challenged. Dileep stays at the school most of his time and takes care of the school.

The entire school has 4 rooms with one bathroom/toilet total and an additional room as a separate building next to it with another bathroom/toilet. There are 35 kids stay there. The facility seems to be small for 35 kids to stay there. This is totally residential for visually challenged kids. There is one cook for them who cooks daily for the kids. There are two ayahs and two teachers. The teachers have undergone some training for mobility, Braille etc (but not certified teachers or trainers). They get paid like Rs.1000 a month, which we thought might be less, but that seems to be OK for the people there considering the cost of living.

When asked Sanju and Dileep if all the kids are totally blind, they said most of them except there are two kids who are partial blind and help the other kids. Dileep is totally blind. In their family Dileep and his sister are blind and this is not hereditary. There are many blind people in Bidar, because there is no good diet or nutrition followed by pregnant women and there is vitamin A deficiency for most of the people there. Sanju said he knows one doctor who not only visits the school and checks out the school kids once in a while and definitely when the new kids join. Sanju and that doctor have designed a nutrition health kit and they supply that in Bidar and neighboring villages where they find any pregnant women. This way they reduce blind people to be born.

Dileep is not only a musician who can play keyboard, but also a good singer. He also performs for local radio and performs for any local activities like AIDS awareness programs etc. He teaches the kids also some music and computer. There is one computer in the front room, which Dileep operates, starts it, uses all the programs including Microsoft Word and can type anything dictated. He showed us that and he could type what ever Govind dictated, without a single spelling mistake. This is all done by a software installed in that computer called JAWS, made specifically for Visually challenged, which will say everything the computer user is trying to do. It will read out through speakers all the menus, the keys being typed etc. This way even the visually challenged can use computers just like normal people. He is planning to learn it completely and teach the other kids. They are planning to make the kids there also do jobs like data entry etc. When asked how will visually challenged people be preferred over normal people for jobs like these. They said they will try their best to make them as good as normal people in doing these jobs. But it seems there is also a local company

which promised to take these kids for such jobs if required and if they perform well. We really liked their confidence and that is what is needed to progress in life.

They are also planning to buy a land about 1km away from present place for 5 to 6 lakhs in a 1/2 acre and planning to build their own building slowly if the funds get available. They have applied for FCRA clearance and once approved Asha Austin is planning to support them. They are also planning to approach Save and Care (?), which is an organization which will support construction of infrastructure for such NGOs only if they have FCRA clearance.

Dileep showed us how he can use Braille, with a Braille puncher. He typed "My Name is Govind and I am from Kanpur" both in Hindi and English as Govind dictated it. We then got introduced to Annapurna, one of the kids there, who did not hear to our conversation at all. She repeated everything what Dileep typed on Braille after she read that. She knows both Hindi and English well along with her mother tongue Kannada.

Then we got introduced to Mahesh and Nagesh. Nagesh was born blind and his parents totally discarded him and used to just keep him in an isolated room and did not teach him anything. He never used to go to school or even get a chance to talk to anybody. He was not even learnt how to go to bathroom or toilet. Then Sanju rescued him and made him join the school after which he improved a lot. Initially he did not even used to talk, not used to go to bathroom for toilet etc. Now he is learnt all that and has become more intelligent. He even does mimicry, mimics different kinds of dogs, small babies crying etc. Later, Annapurna, Mahesh, and Nagesh sang a Hindi song and it was really good. It was clear from this song that the kids learnt good music from Dileep. It was a patriotic song in Hindi. Dileep was planning to make them sing for Independence Day in Delhi.

Please look at the photos that were taken during my visit at <http://giri.kolanupaka.com/index.php?n=Pics.Asha-AshaDeepaSchoolfortheBlindVisit7April2007>

I am very pleased with the visit and the budget requirement from Asha also is not very much (I think it is Rs. 18000 per month = \$400). I think Asha should continue to support it. The only question that was raised in our minds was, how 35 kids were able to live in such a small place and how are they planning to make it to 50 now. I called Sanju couple of days after my visit and he said it really was difficult and they are planning to move out of it very soon.