

Getting off the Block for the Academic Year 2014 – 2015

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Wondering what sadistic pleasure we derived by bringing students almost the day after the final examinations of the academic year 2013- 14 to prepare for Academic Year 2014-15? Wondering if we are in competition with corporate schools which has redefined education, vacation and many other traditional vocabulary associated with schools and students? No, we are not in competition. We are travelling on A Road NOW Less Travelled, a Road, the contours of which is still visible despite the grass that has over grown it. The April 25th to 29th Summer Camp for Human Rights Club Office Bearers got off the block the day after the schools closed for holidays so that when the schools reopen they are ready to shoulder their responsibilities as Human Rights Club leaders! 85 students (girls and boys from government schools) participated in the programme.

People's Action For Rural Awakening as part of its effort to form 1000 human rights clubs in 10 districts of Telengana and Residuary State of Andhra Pradesh opened this summer camp for the leaders of the human right clubs in schools. The participants came from the High schools in the three Mandals of Ravulapalem, Kothapeta Athreyapuram, and Rajamundry where Human Right clubs were initiated during the scholastic year. A total of 85 club leaders participated, 65 boys and 20 girls. Usually the girls would outnumber the boys. But since it was during the holidays and the teachers could not accompany the students, girls were less this time around.

Children come to summer camp in a holiday mood and expect a lot of fun, entertainment, music games and good food. All these elements were inbuilt into this camp and ingenuity was to inlay human right content into these activities. Here learning human rights was done through games, songs, drawing, skits, debates, poster making, slogan writing. This gave the children opportunities to be creative and innovative.

Fr. Thomas Pallithanam assembled a very qualified and "Youth oriented" team to guide the camp activities. Sr. Claire ICM, a much sought after theatre artist and Human right activist, Mr. S. Rajan, human Right activist from People's Watch, Tamilnadu, Dr. Shobha, Retired Principal, Government College Nellore, grand -daughter of Gurram Josua, one of the greatest Telugu Poet, Bro, Ramesh sdb from the Theological Institute at Kavaripecttai became the soul of the camp and inspiration to the participants. The five MSW students (3 ladies and 2 gents) from Andhra university became elder brothers and sisters to the camp participants. The ever present PARA's staff supplemented and complemented the needs of the camp. The "family spirit" much recommended by Don Bosco prevailed in the camp through -out the camp days becoming an unforgettable experience for the participants.

The functionaries of the "Juvenile Justice System" were invited to the camp to interact with the children so that the participants could get a first hand information on the working of the act. How does the law treat children who come into conflict with the law or children who do not get the required "care and protection" from their families which is the basic reason driving children into conflict with law. The police, JJ board, the child welfare committee, the District Child Protection Committee are the functionaries of the JJ act. On 26th the Child welfare committee chairperson and members attended the camp and explained their activities to the camp participants. The District

child protection team interacted with the participants on 28th morning. These inputs enlightened the participants on the children who are at risk due to several factors in society.

In the morning the children started the day with a few yoga exercises followed by breakfast. Bro Ramesh taught some spicy youth songs which the children sang with gusto. The day's human right themes were explained to the participants by Mr. Rajan. The children not only produced drawings, posters, skits, slogans but also presented and explained these to the rest of the participants. Many of the presentations proved that Human Right is a live subject and children can articulate them not only in words but also in different art forms.

While one group tries to express the right to food through a drawing another group was debating whether corporal punishment was good or bad for disciplining the child. Can you express the right to liberty and freedom of speech in a poster or would you like make a skit to tell the world that child marriages are violation of child rights? The programme gave vent to the natural enthusiasm, eagerness to participate and exhibit their talents, original thinking and creative energy of the children.

When the children tried to express the right to food in a drawing the group first went through a thought –exercise and discussed the different possibilities of representing the concept in a drawing. The group that represented the child marriage in a skit thought through the different ways of dramatising the concept for the audience. They have internalised the concept and can articulate it better now. This is the qualification of a human right club leader in a school. Violations become intolerable to the one who has internalised the concept and this makes the leaders “defenders of Human rights”.

The climax of the camp was the daily camp fire held after the supper. Here children participated in action songs and party games. Different types of claps and yells rent the silence of the night. The games were new and were a challenge to the skills of the children. The winners were cheered by the losers and the losers were ready for the next game with the hope of winning. The songs in between added variety to the show. It was like opening up a new world of possibilities to the rural children who had never seen or experienced the like. Fully exhausted by the continuous activities of the day the children were eager to sleep and be energised for the next day.