



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Society for Welfare of Handicapped CC

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Jain.

Location of CC: Patiala, Punjab, India

Key Areas of Focus: Providing quality education and empowering deaf and blind children.

Summary

Society for Welfare of Handicapped CC located in the village of Saifdipur, Patiala, India, and is the only residential school in North India focused on providing the needs of deaf, and blind children through empowerment and education. The school was established in 1967 by the Sardar Amar Singh Kamboj. The Society provides free education, food, and lodging to boys and girls from all different communities, religious backgrounds, and age groups. Students receive both formal and vocational education through qualified teachers with modern teaching equipment. The Society for Welfare of Handicapped values an integrated approach to education, one which stresses sustainable life skills, self-esteem, and courage to enable students to become “service providers, not service seekers”.

1. *What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?*

Our CC, Society for Welfare of the Handicapped, is working for the cause of free education and rehabilitation of deaf and blind children as creative and equal partners in community building. The school is open for everyone irrespective of caste, class, color and region. As a URI CC, we strive to consciously maintain gender and community diversity both in staff and student strength.

2. *Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?*

Although no religious conflict has erupted in this area, the locality is surrounded with clusters of different religious denominations, such as Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs living in harmony. Our attempt is to re-enforce these harmonious communities through mutual cooperation that continue through time.

3. *Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?*

The main activity of our CC is to impart quality and free education, to provide food and housing accommodations for disabled boys and girls from all over India.



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4. *Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?*

We work in close collaboration with religious groups in and around our locality. There is no other bridge-building effort with any specific faith traditions being done here that I'm aware of.

5. *Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.*

Our school and its activities inspire all walks of society to come and offer their services and resources.

6. *Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)?*

The society is fast developing due to generous public support. Our modest beginning has been gradually enriched with resources and improved facilities. Our goal is to make our CC's school a world-class institution for disabled students to be trained and integrated in society.

7. *How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?*

This school is a place where students from different religions and regions are given free quality education, vocational training, and also guidance on how to manage life in a dignified and respectful manner. By inspiring others, we are able to bring cooperation among different faith groups in this field.

8. *How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict? (NOTE: This question is relevant only in areas with violence/open conflict.)*

No any such conflict exists in this area

9. *What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?*

Our school is specifically meant for disabled citizens who as individuals cannot learn how to cope with social challenges. Our students do not have support from family or friends. In this circumstance, the disabled member is forced to feel neglected and marginalized even in their own family, irrespective of any socio-economic status and community differentiation.

10. *Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.*

On an early morning, during winter, Malkait Singh was heading towards his home after being relieved from night duty on his bicycle. Suddenly a seven-year old boy blocked his pass. Malkait stopped and asked the reason for doing so. The boy did not reply instead through gestures made Malkait understand that he was hungry and also could



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not speak. The boy also expressed that he had no home to go, and for the last days he had been living in a Sikh temple (gurudwara). Malkait, finding him deaf and helpless took him to his house, and conducted a search for resources for his rehabilitation. Through his friend Malkait came to know about Patiala School for Deaf and Blind, and admitted him in this school with name the name Abdullah (a Muslim name.) Later school came to know that Abdullah was born in Hyderabad in South India. For the last three years Abdullah has led a dignified life, learning new skills, and receiving an education.

11. *How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?*

As mentioned earlier, Our CC runs a special residential school for disabled students. In the school children are motivated and trained on how to overcome their physical disability, as well as how to transcend caste, class and community barriers. We are working as a strong bridge builder between the disabled and other members. We are equal partners in URI peacebuilding, and maintaining social harmony.

12. *Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?*

Our CC members work in close relationship with the principle number 5 "We listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust." All of our members are working for a common cause, and are composed of families and friends that have known each other for a long time. We have no disputes or conflicts arising between members.

13. *How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?*

URI's global image enhances our vision and horizon. Because of URI we are global partners of peacebuilding. This definitely broadened our social credibility.

14. *Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?*

From URI we expect training and guidance in skill development and resource generation.