

## EDUCATION FOR LIVING (DELHI)

### INTRODUCTION

The Mobile Creches for Working Mothers' Children is a voluntary programme which began in 1969 with a simple creche started by the late Meera Mahadevan. Ms Mahadevan, a writer and housewife who was appointed to a Women and Children's sub-committee in connection with the celebration for the Gandhi Centenary Year, was moved by the plight of construction workers' children who lay on rags in the dust and heat while their parents toiled on work sites. Her response to the situation was translated into action and, assisted by a few voluntary workers, she set up the first creche on a work site in a tent.

It was a spontaneous response to a need of the community without any preplanning or survey. The implementation of the programme resulted in the interaction of a voluntary group of women with the migrant construction worker as well as the economically and socially deprived women in the resettlement colonies following slum clearance in the city of Delhi. As a consequence, the individuals encompassed in the programme became aware of the manner in which they could improve their quality of life.

The "Mobile Creches" described in this case study comprise a complex integrated programme where, although the focal point is child care, several other programmes have evolved subsequently concerning the total family group. A small-scale but intensive programme starting with a creche later expanded its activities to include services for health, nutrition, non-formal education, pre-school and adult education, family planning and community services, and recreation for all members within a family.

The Mobile Creche has been chosen for this study as representing a model of a non-formal education programme for women whose literacy level is low, are migrants/inhabitants of resettlement colonies and who have not been integrated into the mainstream of urban society. In this case, as the target groups are the migrant construction labour on work sites and the low-income working mothers in resettlement colonies in Delhi, the development of the programmes has not followed any rigid plan. In fact, activities have evolved in response to the requirements of the groups.

For the present study, the components of non-formal education have not been isolated from the larger perspective. The non-formal education aspect of the programme is linked with all activities.

### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MOBILE CRECHE (DELHI)

After the establishment of the first creche centre in 1969, three more creches evolved within a period of eight months. Gradually the work expanded and by the end of 1971 the number of creches had grown to ten.

The year 1972-73 witnessed the development of many new aspects of the work as well as an extension of creches at factory sites outside the city limits of Delhi, and a branch in Bombay. Later, during the period when there was a slump in building activity, the Mobile Creche expanded its work to establish centres in the urban resettlement colonies of Delhi.

Along with physical expansion in terms of increasing the number of centres, the programme also expanded in response to the demands of new situations and needs. Recognising that benefit to children would be better and greater if cooperation of mothers could be enlisted, many activities were started experimentally in the search for the best method to meet the current challenge. As a result, Summer Schools for Children, Mother Education Programmes, Systematisation or In-service Programmes, Scholarship and Skills Training Scheme, and the *Lok Doot* (Peoples' Messenger) came into being.

Today, at any given time, there are about 30 centres in operation in Delhi and about 24 in Bombay. Each centre has anything from 50 to 250 children. The total number of children cared for is about 3000 in Delhi and 2500 in Bombay. Although the beneficiaries mentioned are the children, in actual fact, it is the mothers who have also benefited from the programme.

For the year 1979-80, the scheme covered 30 construction sites, and nine resettlement colonies.

Between 1969 and 1980, nineteen construction sites were begun, nine resettlement colonies started, twelve centres opened and nine centres closed.

#### *The Beneficiary Groups*

Attention is focused today on two categories of people both belonging to the deprived section of the community. Whereas, on the one hand, the programme caters for the needs of unskilled labour who work on the building construction sites, on the other it creates greater awareness of a better quality of life among the women in the urban resettlement colonies of Delhi.

#### *Construction Labour*

Several research studies have revealed that the construction labourers in Delhi have migrated from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in search of better economic opportunities.

Generally the close-knit network of kinship among the migrants, and their caste and religion, provide the mechanism through which information is communicated about opportunities available. These elements form important adaptive mechanisms for the migrant construction labourers once they reach the city.

This disadvantaged group from the poorest of the rural poor, and usually from the lowest castes, has strong roots in the village but in actuality spends several years in the city. They continue to live on the periphery of urban life and do not get assimilated into the mainstream of urban living. Their home is the temporary shelter of tin and brick on the construction site without the most basic amenities of water and sanitation. They have no access to education or medical facilities. Both parents work and babies are left in the care of older children who are thus deprived of an education and also of the chance of acquiring agricultural skills which they might have picked up in the village.

The environment is harsh on the child, marked by insecurity as well as devoid of any opportunities of work, education or recreation.

#### *Resettlement Colony Dwellers*

The resettlement colony dwellers are somewhat different. They comprise a heterogeneous mix of skilled workers, salaried workers from economically stronger groups (such as low grade employees of government), and the unskilled illiterate workers who are largely self-employed. The women of this group have to work hard for a living; they do the most menial tasks and are

socially and economically at the lowest rung of the ladder. Inadequate facilities for education, health or sanitation in the environment exposes the child to a cynical self-seeking environment where the philosophy of survival is pervasive.

*The Programme as it is Today*

The Mobile Creche today runs a chain of centres in Delhi and Bombay providing integrated day care for children of the beneficiary groups described above, and also a variety of other programmes aimed at the adult population.

The general objectives of the Mobile Creche are to:

1. provide day care for the young children of working mothers;
2. provide opportunities to children of illiterate and semi-literate parents, to better their education and constructively channel their activities. Identification of the needs of children revealed the desirability of:
  - (a) creches for children up to three years old,
  - (b) *Balwadis* (pre-school) for children from three to six years,
  - (c) non-formal education for children over six years to fourteen years,
  - (d) extra coaching classes for older children to enable them to get admission to municipal schools,
  - (e) recreation, provision of summer camps, sports, and vocational training programmes;
3. provide basic knowledge to the mothers in the fields of nutrition, health and other allied spheres which would help the families to lead a life less riddled with disease.

The specific objectives of the Mobile Creche in relation to the resettlement colonies are to:

4. provide a focal point for nuclear families to find comradeship and pursue common interests;
5. provide training in income-generating skills e.g. sewing and functional literacy.

The specific objectives of the Mobile Creche in relation to the construction sites are to:

6. help migrants to learn the use of city facilities, especially hospitals and the departments responsible for issuing ration cards, and to gain sufficient confidence to use the school system.

*Organisational Structure and Functions*

As the programme evolved at the Mobile Centres is not imposed upon the community on the basis of a predetermined plan, workers determine the activities for the day at each morning meeting of the centre. The flexibility of the daily routine, however, is supported by a strong programme of supplementary nutrition, medication and educational activities.

Although, strictly speaking, it is true that the organisation functions in a hierarchy at three levels, namely management, supervisors and field workers, yet in actual operation workers at each level are given equal importance in the successful running of the centres. In fact, the importance of the field worker was recognised to be crucial in the implementation of the programme at a very early stage, and consequently management and field workers work closely together. This is true not only with regard to the emoluments

drawn but also on decision-making occasions; for example, at meetings and discussions held for the purpose of modifying any programme or finding solutions to day-to-day problems, the opinions of field workers are given weight. This approach in the organisational functioning has resulted in initial respect at all levels as well as a sense of shared purpose. Undoubtedly economic needs prompt field workers to join the organisation; nevertheless, they are as sensitive as the management to the problems of the deprived community whose needs they serve.

#### *Recruitment and Selection of Personnel*

At the field level, personnel are recruited by a process of self-selection. They are placed in a centre to participate and observe, and if they cannot adjust to the demands of the situation, they leave. The Mobile Creche has found from experience that the best field workers are found from among those who have completed high school and belong to the low/middle income group.

Supervisors-cum-trainers are drawn from the field personnel who have proved themselves and have acquired skills through the in-service programmes. Besides supervising they also assist in training the new recruits.

The management consists of a governing body of ten people drawn from persons actively involved with the Mobile Creche. The Chairman, Secretary and five others also hold executive responsibilities.

#### *Funding*

The Mobile Creche meets its annual expenditure from grants from various sources, namely the Government of India, the State Government, international voluntary agencies and trusts, and donations from individuals. Contractors also support a centre by contributing towards the expenses. The amount contributed varies according to the motivation of the contractor. The Mobile Creche also raises funds from its own activities such as the sale of spices and greeting cards, and jumble sales.

### NON-FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN

Very early in the programme, the staff of the Mobile Creche realised that all their efforts to reach the child would be futile and the benefits derived by the infants would be limited, so long as their parents remained unaware and illiterate. This was the beginning of the non-formal education of adults, particularly mothers, of the migrant and resettlement colony families. Thus, over the years, a network of activities has been built up to reach them.

The main objective of the programme was to "create awareness, knowledge and skills required for a better life of the family within the constraints of the environment". As such the non-formal programme today is structured around health, nutrition and practical living, for which a range of techniques has been evolved. While it is true that each organisation evolves within the limitations of its own logic and methodological strategies, the programme of the Mobile Creches could be studied for wider application in those programmes where the child is the entry point for providing non-formal education to the mother. Subsequently, it is she who becomes the most intimate contact point with the community and also the communicator of the needs of the neighbourhood.

#### *Interaction*

One of the most effective techniques used in the non-formal programme is the constant and consistent one-to-one interaction between the staff operating a programme and the target groups. The Mobile Creche uses every opportunity provided during the activities of the day to reinforce continually the animator-learner relationship. For instance, at the Mobile Creche Centres at construction sites, the mid-day break (when mothers come to breast-feed their

children) is an occasion for discussion and conversation which may centre around the day's problems, the items cooked by the mother for the day's meal, or the health of the members of the family. So, indirectly, the conversation concerns itself with the nutrition aspect, health and family life education. In addition to this, the creche-in-charge makes a twice daily round of the community, visiting each household in turn. She knows each member of the family by name and her obvious involvement and interest in the welfare of the family is an encouragement to the mother to participate fully in the other programmes of the creche.

A more formal structure for interaction is provided by the monthly *mothers' meetings* and the literacy classes held for the construction labour. The mothers' meeting is held once a month at each Mobile Creche Centre, either in the day time or in the evening and the topic discussed for the day is decided upon earlier by the staff of each centre. Discussion may focus on subjects like hygiene, nutrition, the need for inoculation, superstition, cooking habits, recipes, etc. The staff team arranges practical demonstrations on topics related to child health and development. Sometimes puppet shows are organised to elaborate a theme and a discussion follows the "shows" to drive home the "message".

#### *Formal Literacy Classes*

Literacy classes, which were started in 1971, today run at most of the twenty odd centres in Delhi, five days a week, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. This is the time when the labourer has finished the hard day's work and, having finished the evening meal, is relatively free to attend the class. Classes for men are held separately from those for the women. Owing to the constraints imposed by the migrancy of the community on construction sites, the size of the class and its composition varies. The number may come down to four or five at times when the labourers go to the village, or increase to 15 or 25 when the camp is full. The same group generally comes only for two to three months or until the construction is completed. Generally, during that time, new enrolments are made as and when others are attracted to the programmes.

The composition of the class is heterogeneous, including adults, school-going children, and school drop-outs who often come to the class along with their illiterate parents. The Mobile Creche thus does not and cannot function with any concept of a "batch" of learners,\* as those attending vary in age from 10 to 45 years and differ in terms of their social and mental developments. Consequently there is total flexibility in the programme and each person progresses at his or her own level of capability.

Although about 1500 adults throughout the year attend classes, average attendance is about 250 men and 150 women each month. The rate of literacy obtained is approximately 15 per cent. A typical literacy class for female construction workers is held by the light of a petromax lamp in a little cleared space in the middle of the colony. Children generally sleep or play around the class; while the evening meal is not yet over in some huts. It takes about half an hour to set up the class by going from house to house and urging the mothers and girls to hurry and attend. An hour or so is devoted to a formal lesson with individual attention for each, and the rest of the time to a discussion. Once a week a session of devotional songs is held.

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\* The learners can be classified in categories of literate, semi-literate (advanced), semi-literate (intermediate) and beginners. The literates are the schoolgoing boys and girls who can read and write fluently; the semi-literates (advanced) are those who are studying part 2 of *Apni Baten*, lessons 4-7, while beginners are either those who are just admitted as illiterates or those who have not reached part 2 of *Apni Baten*.

### *Curriculum Materials*

The Mobile Creche has designed a set of nine reading booklets and a series of two Primers called *Apni Baten* Part 1 and 2 in response to the specific requirements of the groups of learners. Finding the material available for adult learners not adequate or suitable, the Mobile Creche has over the years designed its own curriculum through the combined efforts of the supervisory staff and teachers. The content of the books is based on stories, topical and relevant to the learners in a language familiar to them.

In addition to the books, the Mobile Creche uses other equipment such as flash cards, discussion charts, games, audio-visual aids, and puppets, all of which have been designed at joint workshop sessions of the Mobile Creche staff and experts in non-formal education.

Besides imparting the "three R's", the literacy classes are a focal point for discussing matters of topical interest as well. The newspaper is read out and items of current interest taken up for discussions. Through teacher-participant interaction, the solutions to various day-to-day problems are found and later implemented by the mothers. The literacy classes are generally conducted by the staff who look after the day-care centre of the Mobile Creche and are therefore conversant with all aspects of the lives of the community. Besides, they are familiar with the limitations of the set-up, particularly the difficulty of timings and different levels of the learners. Experience and the cooperation of the participants helps them to overcome several of these limitations.

### *Communication*

Development of communication media is another very vital aspect of the non-formal programme. A very special feature is the organisation of its folk theatre group namely the *Lok Doot* (People's Messenger).

Like all other activities of the Mobile Creche, the Lok Doot has also grown out of a need - that is, in response to a need for entertainment for a group of people who have no access to recreational facilities. Using this need as an entry point, the Lok Doot has become a valuable educational tool to increase the awareness of its audience and reinforce the discussions which are a part of the rest of the programme.

The Lok Doot, which started in 1976, now has twelve members, eight full-time and four part-time. Most of them are regular Mobile Creche staff who have some special talents for drama or music. They are all familiar with the problems of the community and readily acceptable to the community.

For maximum impact and relevance, the everyday dialect of the audience, its favourite current jokes, and contemporary incidents are dramatised. In fact, Lok Doot has created plays, skits and mimes centering on themes and experiences common to the audience. All the material is devised and produced by the collective effort of the members. Plays are built around topics like alcoholism, superstition, child marriage, civic responsibilities, importance of nutrition and prevention of illness, etc.

A typical play is *Rog Rani*, where disease is personified as a queen with her army of germs. Using popular tunes, simple colloquial lyrics have been set to music and with the use of mime a loosely structured play has been built up. Other titles are equally descriptive: *Andh Viswas* (Blind Faith) and *Jhoota Ticket* (False Ticket), dealing with the evils of illiteracy.

A full performance of Lok Doot takes place on an improvised stage in the construction camp or slum, with the help of musicians and drums. Two

members of the group sit in the audience and pass comments to provoke reactions from the audience. Generally two performances are given in a month.

In addition to the Lok Doot, a "mini" Lok Doot also functions in a similar way, using only two or three staff members for its presentations. Themes of the Lok Doot plays are painted on scrolls called *Phad* (a Rajasthani traditional technique), and as the scroll is unrolled, the two performers explain the significance of each picture with songs and mime.

Through experience, the Mobile Creche has discovered that the "audio" element has a much greater impact than the "visual"; this is especially true for an illiterate population for whom the tradition of listening to stories, songs and recitation of epics is a much stronger one than the superimposed one of responding to pictures and charts which they often cannot decode. Hence the stress on the development of Lok Doot which makes use of songs, metaphors, folk lore, rhyme and recitation. As Lok Doot is constantly experimenting with new techniques and media, the repertoire is enlarged. Intensive workshops, once a month, are held and training in theatre skills is given both by Mobile Creche senior staff and also resource persons whose skills are tapped by the Mobile Creche as and when required.

In addition to the theatre medium, Mobile Creche has other communication methods based on the traditional cultural medium of the people, such as masks, puppets, charts etc. These are generally utilised by the mini Lok Doot and such performances at "Mothers' meetings" or at "Nightly meetings" become a starting point for discussion.

The Mobile Creche is concerned not so much with the artistic standard of the representation as with the effectiveness of theatre as a medium of communication. It now proposes to develop its drama activities further by encouraging young adults from among the target groups who attend the literacy classes to participate in the plays. In this way it hopes to increase their social awareness and also strengthen their capacity to work together. Further experiments with new forms of plays are being made by the staff of Mobile Creches. The intention is that role playing and psychological dramas should be performed which will ultimately extend the dramatic skills to a wider group.

### *Training*

As the programmes of the Mobile Creche develop and the activities expand, there is need for trained personnel. As a result a programme of training and management has evolved which is kept under constant review. The training is geared towards developing the ability of the staff to function in the practical situation of the work site. This is achieved through demonstration and guidance at field level. It is bolstered by workshops giving information. The flow of ideas is maintained through regular problem-solving meetings between the staff and community members. This procedure helps to strengthen morale as well as creating a feeling of camaraderie.

The most important input of the training programme is its *human resource* development. The manpower that is most readily available is not trained or skilled. The whole programme rests on developing this manpower specifically for the needs of the programme. Material inputs are kept to a minimum.

Another important aspect of the training programme is that the trainer is at the same time a worker in the field who works alongside the trainee. In fact, if, over a period of time, the trainee proves to be effective, she in turn can hope to become a trainer supervisor.

Each training centre is run by a team of teachers and creche workers. Supervisors, who have had experience in handling centres independently, are in charge of two centres each and senior (zonal) supervisors look after five centres each. Both supervisors and zonal supervisors train new staff and handle site problems.

Policy decisions with regard to the day-to-day working of a centre are not taken by the management on its own. In fact, twice a month at joint meetings, supervisors and field workers discuss problems, new activities, accounts, planning and coordination.

All other categories of staff, semi-literate creche workers, literate creche workers, *Balwadi* (kindergarten), pre-primary and primary teachers attend one workshop a month for further training in methods and curriculum planning. The staff of literacy classes (who are part-time and full-time Mobile Creche staff members) meet every week in the evening.

As the field worker is the lynchpin of the Mobile Creche Programme, much care and thought is given to her training. She is given an orientation course after which she is attached to senior staff at a centre for two years. The exposure in the field, the assignments under the guidance of the supervisor/trainer, and the interaction of various workers and experts at regular workshops all help in training the fresh recruits.

In the first instance the method of discussion and feedback is central to the system of training. Secondly, because the field worker has to work with disadvantaged groups on low cost projects, she is required to develop certain important qualities, namely:

- initiative/ability to create facilities through seeking help from the community: to arrange for water, create level play areas, build boundary walls etc.
- confidence in being able to deal with emergencies, hospital authorities, etc.
- ability to devise activities that interest children and break through the prejudices of new groups.
- multipurpose preparedness for care activities and teaching.
- interest and ability to integrate with the community and participate in their festivities. Ability to organise meetings and communicate.

In addition to this, the training seeks to build up skills, information, and knowledge of methods on infant care, health care, and pre-school and primary teaching.

In a programme like that of the Mobile Creche, hierarchical structures are not relevant since the toughness of the situation demands a sense of unity and comradeship, recognition of the dignity of labour, and equality.

### *Impact*

The initial evaluation of a programme, where the achievements are to be judged in qualitative terms rather than in quantifiable statistics, is a task which is not easy.

Some quantitative indications are however useful, though in a limited way. These are the increase in the number of immunisations/sterilisations;



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the initiation and growth of savings accounts; the number of admissions of children to regular schools; and the numbers attending literacy classes for both children and adults.

The more important and relevant indicators are the ones which reveal the attitudinal changes which have taken place within the community. The parents of children who have attended Mobile Creche once very often look for such facilities wherever they move, while parents of schoolgoing children, who were again initiated into the school concept by the Mobile Creche, have been found to be sufficiently motivated to have children continue their schooling.

The Mobile Creche is able to see a slow change in food habits as well as a desire for a hygienic environment. Recently women have been asking for community latrines to be constructed, as the availability of private spaces decreases in the cities.

While resigned to their lot in many ways, some of the women have also been motivated to ask for different kinds of employment for themselves.

The monitoring and feedback of the programme and experiments are constantly going on. In addition, the Mobile Creche has undertaken the task of systematic collection and analysis of data for the last three years.

### *Constraints*

Since the non-formal programme depends heavily on the input of staff and selects them by a tough process of self-elimination, this itself is a major constraint on the expansion of the programme. Since quality rather than numerical strength is desired, the process is necessarily slow. Linked to this is the problem of finance for programmes. Money being inadequate, the expenses have to be kept low. Efficiency therefore needs to be ensured even when salaries are low.

The special constraint to the Mobile Creche programme is the migrancy of the construction workers' group, which in turn has shaped the entire effort. While other non-formal projects may not be faced with this problem, the techniques which the Mobile Creche has developed to deal with it could be replicated in terms of their flexibility and relevance.