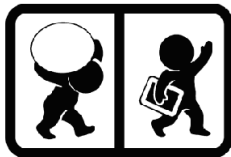


# **A GUIDE TO RESIDENTIAL BRIDGE COURSE CAMPS**

**Children on the move... . from work to school**

**Mary Dowling**



**MV FOUNDATION**

201/202 Narayan Apartments

Sri Hanumanji Cooperative Housing Society

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**Mary Dowling**

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## FOREWORD

This manual is intended to fill a gap just as the camps described herein are intended to bridge a gap. The formal educational system as currently operated caters to those children whose culture is to be part of mainstream society. They and their families have the history of involvement, the familiarity and support required to negotiate the various procedures involved in engaging with the formal education system. In fact, many people reading this are not even aware of these procedures, so much do we take them for granted. It is only when faced with people who have no experience of this world of formal education that the complexity of the processes involved are revealed. Only then, we become conscious of how they can be used to select the clientele for participation from the general population, excluding certain groups of people entirely and deterring others from continuing, even after joining.

The argument that the children of the rich go to school and children of the poor have no need of education is indeed very convincing when the literacy levels in the various socio-economic categories are considered. The fact that this situation has been allowed to become manifest (that this is the actual reality) has meant, for many people and for many years, that it is necessarily so. This 'logic' is all-pervasive and has insinuated itself into every debate on elementary education in this country. There is no welcome in our formal educational system for the children of illiterate parents, the children who have lost their childhood to work and bondage, the children who run households and care for siblings or the girls whose marriages are arranged before they know what these 'marriages' entail. Even though many of these children are hidden from view, society is certainly not ignorant of their existence. Millions of children are employed in industries or on farms and the domestic responsibilities of working parents are often delegated to their children in order to free the adults for paid work. These formal and unorganized contributions to the country's economy are not only tolerated, they are positively encouraged.

Why else do we have a system of education which does not have the capacity to accommodate all children of school going age despite many commitments to the universalisation of elementary education?

Why else do we allow children to continue to work, sometimes in the most horrendous of conditions?

Why else is there an Act in our Constitution which regulates the conditions of employment for working children instead of outlawing the outrageous practice?

It is argued that child labour is a 'harsh reality' in a country yet to enjoy the benefits of the development of its economic potential, that child labour is an 'inevitable' consequence of being poor and that poverty must be eliminated before children can be freed. This argument combined with the 'logical' exclusion described earlier has given rise to an inertia and complacency in the ruling classes and the bureaucracy. This will continue unless we identify the problem and address its causes as well as its effects.

In order to do this, there must be a belief in a different view of the reality. That child labour is not an inevitable consequence of being poor; otherwise, there would be no "poor" children in school - in fact, there are many. That all children have the right to be free and to engage with the formal school system as equals with no more exclusionary practices (tacit or explicit) or deterrents. That in a truly democratic society, no distinction is made between one child and another; otherwise how will people learn to accept and respect each other? We at MV Foundation believe that this view of reality is not only reasonable but absolutely necessary for our society to progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The enormity of the problem i.e. the vast number of children who are out of school overwhelms those who have not yet subscribed to the fundamental principle that the place for children is in school, not at work. A clear commitment is required to allocate resources and personnel to the schools in all areas. Based on its experience of interacting with out of school children and their families since 1991, MV Foundation has adopted five fundamental principles which are considered indispensable in approaching the task of integrating these children into the school going community with a view to full integration in society. These principles are to be accepted without compromise or dilution:

- ***All children must attend full-time formal day schools.***
- ***Any child out of school is a child labourer.***
- ***All work/ labour is hazardous; it harms the overall growth and development of the child.***
- ***There must be total abolition of child labour.***
- ***Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned.***

Dismantling the complex web which detains the working child is not an easy task. (In fact, it becomes an impossible task if the complexity of the problem is ignored.) There are many forces at work which ensure that the child is socialized into accepting the working life as his/ her fate. Understanding these forces is crucial to progress and the initial steps require a dialogue to take place between the relevant parties. This in turn entails communication using language and forms familiar to the children's families and the local community. Initial approaches and behaviour will define the nature of the relationship between those who seek to intervene and the communities involved. For this reason, the early approaches must be planned with care, emphasizing the general nature of the proposed

intervention, adopting a non-judgmental attitude, stressing the positive effects on the whole family and the community of releasing the child from work and reassuring all involved of ongoing support during the transition phase from the practice of child labour to full-time formal schooling.

The Bridge Course camps, which are the subject of this Guide, are an important part of this transition phase but they are just that – a part of an overall strategy or process. The essence of this process requires a variety of groups of people within a community to change the practices of generations and to adopt behaviours which run contrary to the accepted beliefs of their current leaders as well as their forefathers. Many would question whether people are capable of change to this extent. It has been the experience of the MV Foundation that, given the opportunity to view the children in a different light, few people would knowingly deprive a child of his/ her freedom and prevent them from joining the ranks of the literate. Families of working children are aware of the benefits of schooling; they see the well-groomed, uniformed students everyday in the towns and villages. However, they need to be convinced that they too have the right to be part of that reality – of schools, uniforms, exams and play.

The process of mobilization within the community creates a desire in the working children to be free to attend full-time formal schools. Having convinced the child and the community of the value of participation in education, it would be unethical to deny any child of school going age the opportunity to enroll within a short time span. Releasing children from work, though critical in its own right, must be combined with school enrolment if the practice is to be sustainable. However, there is a world of difference between the working lives of child labourers and the formal school system. The Bridge Course camps attempt to create a space for children where they can gain respite from the strictures of working life, allow a new identity as an individual responsible primarily for him/ herself to develop and at the same time, to prepare for the demands of full-time schooling. In this way, the camps provide a bridge for former working children to attain the status of students.

These Bridge Course camps have proved to be both effective and popular; for this reason, many organizations have adopted the practice based on the MV Foundation model. It must be cautioned that the Bridge Course camps are not a panacea for all ills. Without the context of overall strategies for change and the mobilization of people at the local levels, the camps will achieve little that is sustainable or replicable. This Guide sets out to situate the Bridge Course camps in context and to advise that serious consideration be given to the participation by the local people in all the stages involved in this most significant of interventions on behalf of the child and for the benefit of society as a whole.

**Dr. Shantha Sinha**

Secretary Trustee

MV Foundation

# The Organisation

## M.VENKATARANGAIYA FOUNDATION

The MV Foundation has been actively involved in removing children from work and enrolling them in formal schools since 1991. The work began in 3 villages in Andhra Pradesh when 200 children were liberated and mainstreamed. As the project expanded its reach, the extent of the need became more and more apparent.

*Over a period of **14 years**, a total of about **3,00,000 children** have been withdrawn from work and sent to schools in the 13 districts where MV Foundation is active. Most of them have subsequently been admitted to formal schools and government social welfare hostels or residential schools run by APSWREIS. MV Foundation is active in **6000 villages** of Ranga Reddy, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Adilabad, Mahabubnagar, Chittoor, Nalgonda, Kurnool, Kadapa, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Anantapur, Warangal districts of Andhra Pradesh operating in 137 mandals. Currently it monitors the status of over 650,000 children in school and out of schools in all the villages in its project area through a database maintained at the village and mandal level.*

### **MV Foundation as an Implementing Agency**

MV Foundation is directly implementing the programme in 13 districts. MV Foundation youth volunteers conduct **mobilisation drives** and relentlessly pursue every out of school child and devise a plan to get him/ her into school. Older children (9-14 years) are put through a **bridge course** that equips them to catch up with regular school-going children. MV Foundation has so far reached out to over 50,000 children through this programme. Subsequently, they are mainstreamed into formal schools and followed up on a regular basis to ensure that they do not drop out. Younger children (5-8 years) are directly admitted to schools. There is a detailed **follow-up** programme to ensure a minimum dropout rate and make the education system more accessible to working children. This involves getting birth certificates, negotiating with teachers for admission, ensuring hostel admissions, etc. Under the programme, education activists are trained to identify and remove every impediment preventing a child labourer from becoming a full-time student. This includes handling such **sensitive issues** as age at marriage for girls.

In the course of implementing its programme, M V Foundation has formed alliances with the following groups:

- **Bala Karmika Vimochana Vedika (BKVV)**: an alliance of over 2500 school teachers from 18 Districts of Andhra Pradesh, initiated by MV Foundation to

support the campaign for the liberation of child labour.

- 30,000 local **youth volunteers**, in Andhra Pradesh who have participated in rallies, marches, public meetings at the village, mandal and district level to campaign against child labour.
- Over 1500 **elected PRIs** in all the Districts of the MV Foundation project area.
- **Women's groups** and **School Education Committees** (SECs) for campaign and mobilisation. These groups have federated at the Mandal and District levels on the issue of child labour.

On the basis of the high levels of co-operation and support received, MV Foundation has incorporated members of all the above groups along with parents into **Child Rights Protection Forums** (CRPFs) in every village and also at the Mandal and the District levels. The membership of the branches of the Forum is about 75,000.

## **Replicability**

The MV Foundation programme has been implemented in a variety of areas and has been adopted by diverse groups of people:

- in **tribal and forest regions, coastal belts, deserts and dry land farms**
- among **fisher folk, nomads, tribal people, migrants, landless poor, agricultural labourers and quarry workers.**

The response has been positive in all cases.

**MV Foundation does not set up parallel institutions to the schools, Social Welfare hostels, Gram Panchayats and other state institutions.** Over a period of time, the MV Foundation programme blends with the existing government programmes, enriching rather than supplanting them. MV Foundation strongly believes that to be sustainable, it must work through existing institutions and build community support to strengthen these institutions and their capacities. This is done to ensure that they commit themselves to protecting child rights, in particular the right to education.

MV Foundation believes that the key to the replicability of the programme arises out of the clear set of non-negotiable principles that it has adopted. The MV Foundation model has been adopted by various agencies in these states:

- **Rajasthan:** Government-run Lok Jumbush Programme entitled 'Balika Shibirs' for adolescent girls.
- **West Bengal:** Cini Asha uses Bridge Course camps and social mobilisation to mainstream child labour in Kolkata.



- **Uttar Pradesh:** CARE INDIA runs bridge courses for adolescent girls in Lucknow.
- **Tamil Nadu:** Government-run Slum Clearance Board project
- **Orissa:** UNDP supported programmes.
- **Assam:** DPEP courses in 9 districts
- **Madhya Pradesh:** DPEP courses in 25 districts.
- **Maharashtra:** co-operation with partner NGOs.

## **MV Foundation as a Training and Resource Agency**

MV Foundation has conducted training sessions and programmes for hundreds of governmental and non-governmental organisations on the issue of child rights in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere in the country. MV Foundation has never hesitated to respond to requests from NGOs, elected representatives or the government.

### **Orientation and exposure**

- In the past 5 years, all district level officials of the Departments of Education, Social Welfare, Women and Child Welfare in the Government of Andhra Pradesh have been given orientation and an exposure to MV Foundation's project area.
- Training of State-level staff of the DPEP from all the states in the country.

### **Perspective building**

- Workshops on 'Child Labour and Education' for NGOs working in India who are supported by UNDP.

### **Capacity building**

- Workshops, on the job training, planning and monitoring for NGOs and the DPEP/ SSA in seven states.

### **Network with international agencies**

MV Foundation conducts workshops, trainings and orientation programmes e.g. capacity-building workshops for PRIs, youth groups, school committees and staff of Aasaman Nepal (an NGO) on behalf of Save the Children Fund, Japan.

The experience gained over the years combined with its organisational and technical strengths allows MV Foundation to confidently take on the responsibility of implementing programmes for the elimination of child labour. The aim is to reach all out of school children between the ages of 5 and 14 years and mainstream them into formal schools.

## **Organizational Structure**

### **Board of Trustees:**

MV Foundation works under the guidance of a Board of Trustees and a Finance Committee, which meet once in two months. The Secretary Trustee is in charge of formulating policy and has ultimate responsibility for fulfilling the commitments made on behalf of the Trust.

The tasks of assessing the strengths of a constantly developing programme in the entire project area, meeting targets, responding to specific requests, designing plans and activities, building campaign strategies and working out the logistics of implementation are carried out by experienced **Project Coordinators**.

**District Coordinators** are in charge of drawing up monthly plans for the implementation of the programme in consultation with the district-level core staff. They also network with officials at the district level, schoolteachers, elected representatives, employers and youth groups and co-operate with them in carrying out the programme.

The District Co-ordinators are assisted by 137 **mandal-in-charges**, 500 **cluster organizers** and 2000 **education activists**. MV Foundation also works with more than 2000 Gram Panchayats, School Education Committees, and 2000 government schoolteachers. At any point in time, it has a minimum of 50 Residential Bridge Course camps for children withdrawn from work with about 9,500 - 10,000 children under the guidance of 52 senior **camp-in-charges** and 535 trained **camp teachers** to conduct the bridge course. Over 64 senior staff follow up and monitor the progress of children in school and their well-being in the hostels.

### **Decentralised structure**

The structure of the organisation encourages a decentralised decision-making process where mandal level staff are given autonomy to plan, monitor and implement the programmes. They are trained in programme content and also on organisational and management issues such as:

- leadership and team building
- review meetings and participatory decision making
- delegation of duties
- responding to feedback
- risk taking.

They are also trained to prepare budgets and maintain accounts for the programmes that they manage.

## **Impact**

The benefits of this programme are many. In addition to the fact that children no longer work and go to schools, the programme also has an impact in improving the quality of life of the poor, increasing wage levels for agricultural workers, strengthening the local schools and making them accountable. It also creates a vast resource base for all the stakeholders including the members of Gram Panchayats, School Education Committees, school teachers and youth who work as resource persons to introduce the programme in other areas of Andhra Pradesh as well as in other states in India

The programme also demonstrates to the policymakers, both nationally and globally, that it is indeed possible to abolish child labour and give every child the right to avail of elementary education.



# **A Guide to Residential Bridge Course camps**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The MV Foundation Residential Bridge Course Camp (RBC) is regarded by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Government of India and several NGOs in the country as being vital to the strategy for integrating older children into the formal school system. In the drive towards universalisation of elementary education, it is important not to forget the children of school going age who have not enrolled previously. The RBC is a residential programme for out of school children where they can learn to read and write at their own pace and then go on to enroll in Government schools. It is envisaged that these camps would be an interim measure until such time as all children between the ages of 5 and 14 years are attending full-time formal schools.

### **The need for Residential Bridge Course camps**

The objective of the Bridge Course programme is to create a space not only for children but also for the parents, schoolteachers, the locally elected bodies (Gram Panchayats) and the community to adapt to the changed situation of the children.

Removing children from their homes and workplaces and enrolling them in schools involves a great deal of changes in the lives of the family and the community as a whole. The RBC camps were devised as part of the overall strategy of smoothing the transition of children from work to school for everybody involved. It is only in this way that the programme will be sustainable. The Residential Bridge Course camps are important components of social mobilization. The camps serve the purpose of establishing links with the community and helping them understand the possibility of bringing older children back to school. The following is a summary of how the camps help the relevant parties to cope with the initial changes.

### **The children**

The Residential Bridge Course serves the purpose of helping in the transition from workers to students. Children who have been withdrawn from work are enabled to join classes appropriate to their age. This changes the whole world of the child and allows for personal growth and development in a protected environment.

### **The parents**

It prepares parents to accept a situation where their children are no longer available for work. In other words, parents must make all relevant adjustments within the family to cope

with the altered situation. There are significant changes in the attitudes of parents as they appreciate the difference that education makes to the overall development of their child. This is truly a revealing experience, particularly for those who have had no direct contact with the formal educational system previously and who never imagined that they could.

## **The school and the partners in education**

MV Foundation helps schools and Ashram schools to accept older children by providing support, advice and training. These institutions are encouraged to work out strategies to respond to the needs of the first generation learners. Stakeholders such as schoolteachers, officials of the education department and all other departments who deal with children and child labour are invited to visit the camps. As the camp is a bridge between work and school, the importance of familiarizing the education partners with the background and history of the camp children is vital. Only then can they plan for their integration into the formal system of schools and hostels.

## **The local bodies**

It causes the local bodies to monitor and review the functioning of schools, especially with regard to the status of dropouts and children who have never been enrolled in schools. That the local bodies take responsibility for **all** the children in the locality is one of the most important aims of the whole process of mobilization and awareness raising in the community.

This Guide sets out the context in which the RBC camps are located, describes the prerequisites to starting a camp and details the activities in the camp itself and during the period after enrolment to formal schools. The Guide is divided into three sections:

**Section 1 : Pre-camp activities**

**Section 2 : Camp life**

**Section 3 : Mainstreaming and Support**

# **A Guide to Residential Bridge Course camps**

## **Section 1 : PRE-CAMP ACTIVITIES**

The strategies outlined below are necessary prerequisites for starting a Residential Bridge Course camp. However, they do not need to follow any particular sequence and do not have a regimented design for practical application.

### **1.1 Social Mobilisation**

- 1.1.1 Movement for change
- 1.1.2 Enlisting community support
- 1.1.3 Celebrating heroes
- 1.1.4 Creating a norm
- 1.1.5 Local institutions

### **1.2. Motivating young people**

- 1.2.1 The MVF approach
- 1.2.2 Respect
- 1.2.3 Survey and campaigning
- 1.2.4 Saidulu's experience – Step by Step

### **1.3. Mobilization and Institution building processes**

- 1.3.1 Leadership
- 1.3.2 Successful intervention
- 1.3.3 Emergence of CRPF and GRPF

### **1.4. Contacting children**

- 1.4.1 Child labour and education
- 1.4.2 Where they are
- 1.4.3 Building confidence

### **1.5. Teaching volunteers**

- 1.5.1 Identifying teachers
- 1.5.2 Conducting teacher-training programmes

1.5.3 Principles in practice

1.5.4 Ongoing training, mentoring and support

## **1.6. Practical arrangements**

1.6.1 Sourcing accommodation

1.6.2 Facilities

## **1.1 Social Mobilisation**

### **1.1.1 Movement for change**

Under the system as it currently operates, the children in schools are catered to from the resources allocated by the government. However, a significant number remain out of school. In order to move towards a position where all children are enrolled in full-time formal day schools, where universalisation of elementary education becomes established, a movement for change must be generated through mobilization within the communities. The institutionalized education system as it exists does not cater to the needs of first generation learners and there is a need for adaptation.

The **aim** of this movement for change is twofold:

1. To change attitudes which prevent children from attending school.
2. To build the capacities of the state system of education and the educational institutions to respond to the first generation learners so that all schools are equipped to serve the needs of children from poor families.

The movement will cease to be necessary when the institutions, structures and processes are in place to accommodate all children under a truly national system of education.

### **1.1.2 Enlisting community support**

The programme of withdrawing children from work and enrolling them into schools looks simple. However, it requires patience and giving the poor due **respect**. Illiterate parents want their children to have a better life than theirs. They accept their own destiny but know instinctively that access to education can improve the quality of their children's future.

Appeals to the employers must be made. There could be resistance to the idea that children will no longer be available for work. Employers perceive the withdrawing of bonded labour children from work as questioning their authority. There could be a hardening of stands and at times, this issue is seen as an act of defiance by the poor or lower castes. On such occasions, local institutions should act as mediators in support of child rights. They must pacify the employers.



### 1.1.3 Celebrating heroes

Although it seemed a most unlikely strategy for MV Foundation in the early days, the practice of congratulating and felicitating parents and employers for their part in releasing child labour to school life has proved to be very successful and popular. Choosing the path of encouragement and promotion is based on the philosophy that people will do the honourable thing if given the opportunity and the motivation.

### 1.1.4 Creating a norm

Social mobilization is the context within which MV Foundation works to liberate working children and spread the practice of enrolment of all children in the age group 6 to 14 years in schools. Without the support of the local community, the whole process is not sustainable in the long-term and the people most affected will not gain ownership of the programme. The tradition of not sending children to school is so engrained in the community that it would require concerted efforts on the part of **all** sectors to change attitudes and approaches. The ultimate goal is to create a norm of sending children to school which can withstand any pressures, internal or external.

Working children remain at work not because they want to, but often because there are forces which prevent them from changing their actual situation. The vested interests of employers and the lack of familiarity of parents with the system combined with the unwillingness of the state machinery to accommodate all children of school going age are deterrents to the universalisation of elementary education. Just as the urban middle class are party to a culture which regards education as a necessary part of childhood and adolescence, many of the rural poor grow up in an environment of illiteracy and child labour.

MV Foundation promotes a dual approach to the goal of **universalisation of elementary education** - on one hand, the working children must be freed and simultaneously, they must be made ready to engage with formal schools in their locality. A comprehensive approach is required to remove the restrictions which hold children back and to facilitate conditions which enable access to school. All these strategies of social mobilization are designed to operate on the two opposing locales: the work place and the school.

These sites are most affected by the removal of children from work and the universal enrollment in schools. If those who occupy those sites are not convinced of the validity of the argument in favour of schooling then, at the first obstacle, the house of cards will come tumbling down. The foundations must be laid for resilience and longevity.

**Integrated approach:** This has implications for how the MV Foundation approaches its work in the community - it must be an integrated approach based on inclusion and collective decision-making. The mobilization activities give rise to the emergence of support groups which in time may consolidate as a forum for the protection of the rights of the

child. This forum can attract the participation of people who seem to have little in common or indeed are typically in opposition to each other - landlords and tenants, employers and employees, educated and illiterate, rich and poor. Protecting the rights of the child is an emotive issue and many people like to have their status enhanced by being associated with a noble cause.

### **1.1.5 Local institutions**

There must be a consensus in the community on the need to strengthen the existing structures such as the schools, social welfare hostels or ashram schools. This requires the participation of local institutions such as the **Gram Panchayats** and the **School Education Committees** [SECs]. A consequence of social mobilisation will be the identification of potential **partners** for the programme and an increase in the responsibility taken by local institutions for the insistence on children's right to education through formal schools.

The effects of mobilization on schools involves expanding their activities to accommodate all the children in their surrounding areas. This would require extra classrooms or school buildings, the appointment of more teachers, provision of equipment and materials and framing policies which guarantee the quality of education.

Abolishing child labour and universalizing elementary education simultaneously requires provision to be made for older children who cannot easily be accommodated in the existing classes in formal schools – at least initially. This necessitates 'bridging' from one state to another and is the reason for the establishment of the **camps**.

## **1.2 Motivating young people**

Many people who visit the MV Foundation camps are impressed by the enthusiasm and vigour of the camp teachers. Likewise, those who witness the youth activists at work in the community marvel at how committed and dedicated they are.

The youth volunteers come from a similar background to the children with whom they work; they have an instinctive understanding of the child's experience and an empathy with their situation. Training given to volunteers is done within the context of their own lived experience; they gain confidence in theories which resonate with this experience – in this way, the programme and process make sense to them. The MV Foundation programme offers an ideological framework for the youth to situate their background and plan for future change.

***You see things as they are and you ask 'Why?'***

***I dream of things that never were and ask 'Why not?'***

**GB Shaw**

As a group, young people tend to be attracted by those who seek change, who are willing to struggle for an ideal and who are not afraid of obstacles they may face. They also

like the fact that MV Foundation regards them as partners in the programme with the aim of sharing resources, not delivering goods or services. They know that education is a good thing and they want to play their part in sharing that with others.

### **1.2.1 The MV Foundation approach**

MV Foundation's approach is different to the attitudes which prevail in the environment. This approach is positive, it is optimistic and thus generates interest amongst the young people. These young people had mostly been regarded as "misfits" in their communities, having had an elementary education but typically not enough to enable them to leave their village to take up a professional occupation elsewhere. They had been treated as if they have done something wrong by going to school. The old arguments like

***"Why should poor children go to school?"***

***"Wouldn't they be better off learning a trade?"***

would erode their confidence over time and lead them to question themselves. MV Foundation presents them with a constructive view of themselves and the struggles they have been through and reassures them that the pursuit of education is the right thing to do.

However, having lived with the dominant ideology all their lives, many will have internalized the skepticism and cynicism. The challenge for the trainers at the initial sessions is to reach into the hearts of the young people and make a connection with them.

The volunteers are made aware of the two arguments:

- 1) that all children should be free and in school
- 2) that education is of no use to poor people.

The group is encouraged to debate and discuss and then, each volunteer must decide which side he/ she is on if he/ she is to continue with MV Foundation. They must make a commitment to the principle. During the programme, the majority of participants decide to be directly involved and others usually offer support in whatever way they can.

### **1.2.2 Respect**

The MV Foundation approach to training volunteers is characterized by respect. As already mentioned, instead of denigrating their past histories, MV Foundation appreciates them for the progress they have made so far. When the young people register for the activists' training, they fill in a form with their personal details and answer a question regarding the literacy of their parents on the form (yes/no). The answers are tabulated immediately (no matter how large the number of participants) and the results are given to the group during the course of that day's training. Typically, majority of the participants are first generation literates. This exercise is effective in a number of ways.

- it establishes a direct contact with the participants and is a practical demonstration of MV Foundation's interest in engaging with them

- it creates a bond among the members of the group
- it creates a link between the participants' families and the children.

From this starting point, the MV Foundation staff can speak about the benefits of education as opposed to the illiteracy of their parents and the message is conveyed to the youth that they too can be educators. Another way of showing respect for the volunteers is by listening to their ideas for innovation in the implementation of the programme and supporting their strategies for intervention. The trained volunteers who go on to train others tend to repeat the process they have been through themselves i.e. the transition from skepticism to acceptance to inspiration.

### **1.2.3 Survey and campaigning**

A **survey** of children in and out of school should be carried out by the local youth. This survey would be also an opportunity to campaign on the issue, establish contact with all the groups in the village and generate an open dialogue and discussion on the matter. **Questions** raised and responded to in the process would be:

*What will happen to the families if children do not work and contribute to the family income?*

*Of what use is education if it cannot provide jobs?*

*Would educated children be “spoilt” and not respect their parents?*

*Would they be available for any physical or manual work?*

**With regard to the girl children the following apprehensions are to be tackled:**

*Why should girls go to school? They will get married and go away to the in-laws' house in any case.*

*Is it not better that they are taught to cook and do the work at home and in the fields?*

*If they get education then the dowry demanded will increase. Who is going to bear all these expenses?*

*She will have scant respect for her elders.*

The survey also provides the first occasion for a contact with parents in a village and helps in motivating them to participate in village meetings and public debates on children. Parents are encouraged to learn from experiences of others in the same village who had managed to send their children to school instead of work. There begins a process of mutual reinforcement of ideas, which strengthens the resolve of the parents to send their children to schools.

**Campaign:** As well as the youth orientation programmes and the survey, activities to generate an atmosphere conducive to the elimination of child labour include:

- *Street theatre and children speaking of their own experiences (testimonies)*
- *Rallies and public meetings*
- *Discussions with the people*
- *Door to door campaigns*
- *Wall posters*
- *Gram Sabha – village community meetings*
- *Petitioning the authorities.*

In this process it must be recognized that the RBCs are also essential components of the mobilization strategy. In other words they are not to be regarded as educational institutions.

#### **1.2.4 Saidulu's experience – Step by Step**

This is the story of how a young man from Nalgonda went from being a teacher in a private school to becoming an MV Foundation activist and then a camp in-charge.

##### **Step 1:**

Saidulu went with a friend on an exposure visit to the MV Foundation camp in Ranga Reddy. At the time, he was working as a teacher in a private school in Suryapet. At the camp, he took part in discussions about awareness raising activities. On his return, he spoke to other youths in his village about the work of the MV Foundation and its strategies to remove children from work. The young people then started the debate in their village on the issue of child labour and enrolment in schools. This debate went on for 3 months. At this stage, they received no funds from MV Foundation, just support and advice.

##### **Step 2:**

MV Foundation sent a resource person, Yadaiah, to the area to support the youth group's efforts. Momentum was building and representatives from youth groups in the surrounding villages came together to discuss how to proceed in their area.

##### **Step 3:**

At a mandal youth meeting in Suryapet, a **workshop** was conducted by Venkatesh from MV Foundation on

- child labour
- how to conduct a survey.

During the workshop, the participants were forced to clarify their own thinking on the issues involved and their level of commitment to the cause of the child's right to education was challenged. *Saidulu describes this as having to reconsider one's whole belief system.* Debate was a central feature of the workshop.

##### **Step 4:**

The **survey** was conducted by the youth group members; they divided the area into

Name:

Father's name:

Age:

Family details:

Brothers:

Sisters:

Where the child is working:

What type of work?

Bonded labour? Yes/ No

Ever enrolled in school? Yes/ No.

If yes, at what stage did the child drop out?

clusters of 3 villages each and six groups then covered 18 villages in total. The target group for the survey was the children in the 6 to 14 years age and all households in each village were visited. The information was gathered under the following headings:

The survey was conducted over a 3 month period and simultaneously the youth groups campaigned in the villages using rallies, wall posters and meetings to generate interest and to challenge the attitudes to child labour issues. These activities had the effect of arousing curiosity in the villagers.

***The results of the survey showed that 3 out of every 10 children of school going age were out of school. Of this group, 1 in 10 were bonded labour, that is to say more than 350 young children were sold into bondage for the sake of a loan.***

During this time, Yadaiah and Venkatesh identified and recruited 10 **youth volunteers** from the groups. In meetings, the young people spoke to the political leaders and subsequently, **support groups** were formed in each village. Generally, these groups consisted of individuals who had taken a particular interest in the youth groups' initiatives e.g. other young people (friends, relatives, etc.) or village elders (anxious to display leadership).

### **Step 5:**

MV Foundation invited these support groups from the villages in the area to **an exposure visit to a camp** in the Ranga Reddy district. In all, 60 villagers took part in the exposure visit. As a result the elders, in particular, began to play a more active role in motivating the families of working children to withdraw their sons and daughters from work and send them to school. They committed more of their time to the issue and were able to address many of the concerns expressed by the parents e.g. :

**Who will look after the children?**

**What about food and other daily requirements?**

***Are these children not too old for schooling?*** (This was the biggest doubt expressed.)

The answers given by the new converts were illuminating:

**We have seen children like yours in the Ranga Reddy camp.**

**Here we are not taking our children seriously; there, they are well looked after, clean and neat, hair nicely combed.**

**Even the older children are reading and writing.**

**The atmosphere is warm and friendly; the teachers sit and discuss with the children.**

**This learning is a shared experience.**

### **Step 6:**

The next step was to arrange **Motivation Centres** for the working children. These are essentially 3-day non-residential camps which aim to withdraw the children temporarily from home or work to allow parents and employers get used to coping without the child. 150 children participated in these centres. Parents were encouraged to visit if they so wished.

### **Step 7:**

Approximately 9 months after the mobilization, the **Residential Bridge Course camp** was opened with an initial group of less than 40 children. Within 2 months, that number had risen to almost 200.

**Comment :** The whole process was not without its difficulties, but the

- *elders*
- *exposure visits*
- *support groups*

all helped to overcome them.

## **1.3 Mobilisation and Institution Building Processes**

### **1.3.1 Leadership**

The youth in the villages are the first point of entry to the community. The next level of engagement is with the leaders: the elders, the Gram Panchayat and the sarpanch. The final group is the government schoolteachers. Of course, the progression is not always so linear or in distinct stages. People involved in transitions of such a fundamental nature need

constant reassurance and reinforcement of the arguments which support the change in attitude and behaviour.

### **1.3.2 Successful intervention**

Successful intervention depends on:

- *local participation in policy decisions*
- *involvement by political leaders*
- *connecting with parents' latent desire to see their children educated.*
- *respecting the dignity of the people*
- *understanding the village community in terms of power structures, hierarchies, status and the internal resolution of problems or conflicts.*

**From campaign to institutions:** All campaign must evolve into institutions and programmes at each level, wherein the participants such as the youth, women's group, members of SECs and Gram Panchayats meet on a regular basis. In other words local bodies, comprised of members united in the cause of liberation of child labour, are constituted. The members of these forums would emerge from those who have taken an active part in the campaigns.

### **1.3.3 Emergence of Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) and Girl Rights Protection Forum (GRPF):**

CRPFs or GRPFs can be formal (standing) or informal (ad-hoc) committees. The CRPF evolved from the support groups which were formed in various villages to respond to the needs of the local children. In the earlier days, this typically occurred when there was some intransigence on the part of the employer or the parents and a concerted effort was needed to move the situation forward. These support groups were generally convened and activated when specific cases of protecting a girl against marriage or abuse had to be pursued. They would also hear the appeals of children wanting to abandon work in favour of going to school. These local committees have been so effective that in some locations they have taken on the roles formerly associated with MV Foundation.

CRPF has assumed a certain prestige because it is a registered body and its membership includes some of the important leadership figures in the community. It has a moral authority because of the honourable stance it adopts in favour of a disadvantaged and vulnerable group. CRPF has over 75,000 members and operates at village, mandal, district and state level. Membership is only open to those nominated by existing members. The 60 member executive body at state level is involved in lobbying and campaigning with government bodies. CRPF interacts with government officials, political leaders, youth groups e.g. SBVV and government teachers.



## 1.4 Contacting children

### 1.4.1 Child labour and education

The programme must base itself on a firm conviction that all children out of school are deprived and exploited and must be regarded as child labour and that the right place for every child to be in is the school. It must understand that children's right to education must be protected by one and all. This must be regarded as non-negotiable.

It requires tenacity and skill to negotiate and maintain a dialogue with all the participants such as the employers, school teachers, officials and non officials, Gram Panchayat members and so on. They need to know that their contribution is indispensable to the successful accomplishment of restoring to children their right to education.

### 1.4.2 Where do they exist

It is not an easy task to contact children who are out of school and in work. They are so busy that to get hold of them while at leisure is impossible. They do not have a place where they can be met for even a couple of minutes. If they are girls they have to be caught on their way to the fields, or on the farms during meal times. The best time is when they are in groups on their way back home from work. They can also be contacted while they are tending to cattle, fetching water or fuel wood. **They become confident and hope to abandon work and join schools once the public debate and discussion on their right to education begins.**

### 1.4.3 Building confidence

Children need a lot of persuasion, as their sense of moral responsibility for their families is deeply ingrained. A process of social mobilization is necessary through which everyone in the society expresses outrage that children who are out of school are being exploited. This gives them the confidence to withstand the moral and cultural pressures operating on them. Their confidence is strengthened if they know that there are concrete arrangements in place to prepare them for the world of books and schools. A concrete programme such as the setting up of a Residential Bridge Course camp sends out a serious message from the Government that they are truly serious about educating older children and sending them to mainstream schools.

## 1.5 Teaching volunteers

During the process of mobilization itself, the task of identifying the people who will be responsible for the implementation of the programmes is undertaken. The young people who take part in the discussions at the local level on the future of the village in relation to the question of children and their rights will be invited to the of 3-day Orientation training. Those who are interested in becoming **teachers** in the Bridge Course camps will be given further training in preparation for the long- or short-term camps. Those who choose to

continue to work in the community are trained as **community mobilisers** with an emphasis on mobilization and motivation. Selected volunteers will work as **organizers** in a cluster of villages to offer support to the schools, hostels and in the field.

### 1.5.1 Identifying teachers

The teachers are key to the functioning of the camp. They are usually first generation learners. The criteria for eligibility of teachers in the bridge course camps must primarily be that of their participation in the programme for social mobilization, identifying children who are in work and bringing them to the camp. They must first of all play the role of an activist and understand the context from which children have actually come. **Trainees select themselves by displaying high standards of motivation and commitment.** It must be understood that their dedication and commitment towards protection of child rights gives them sufficient qualification to take on the role of educator and mentor.

**Motivation:** those who wish to teach in the camps must be motivated by the issue of the child's right to education, not the job.

**Commitment:** the trainees should be committed to the ideals of the organization and be ready to work towards those ideals.

**Educational background:** Typically, trainees will be at least class X passed or Intermediate passed or graduates/ Intermediate discontinued.

They are usually but not necessarily from the same village or area as the children.

### 1.5.2 Conducting teacher-training programmes

Trainees are given instruction in how to conduct a Bridge Course as well as basic management of the camp before they join as teachers. Many of them in fact, would have already undergone training as child rights activists through their participation in the campaigns and mobilization. In this way, they are clear about the purpose of the Residential Bridge Course in the context of social mobilization. Trained teachers are fully aware and convinced of the fundamental principles of the MV Foundation programme.

There are programmes of training for Bridge Course teachers for short-term and long-term camps. The duration and the summary of the content of each programme is as follows:

**Short-term Bridge Course camp teachers' training:** 21 days in 3 stages

#### **Course content:**

- Objectives of the Bridge Course
- Counselling children and preparing them for student life
- Teaching the alphabet, reading and writing
- Teaching basic mathematics
- Preparation for entry to formal schools

**Long-term Bridge Course camp teachers' training:** 35 days in 5 stages over one year

### **Course content**

- Subject-wise training in planning to teach older children
- Reading texts
- Setting up a library
- Preparation for public examinations
- Preparation for entry to formal schools

### **Common elements**

Training for all teachers involves exploration, discussion and debate on the following topics:

#### **Explore:**

- who is child labour and what type of work do they do?
- what are the child's rights?

#### **Discuss:**

- the non-negotiable principles
- non-violence and discipline
- community mobilization and motivation
- teacher-pupil relationship
- specific problems faced by girl children

#### **Information is given on:**

- Government policies
- Child Labour Act 1986, Bonded Labour Act

**Activities** include role-plays and creating Teaching/Learning materials.

### **1.5.3 Principles in practice**

The following components are given priority in terms of the application of the principles discussed above in real situations.

**Teacher and the child :** Prospective camp teachers must be sensitized to the background of the children – often characterized by a history of abuse and exploitation involving beating and punishment. It must be made clear that these children also deserve to be treated with respect. The issue of the entire community's responsibility for the child's welfare should be stressed.

The camp teachers are made aware of the **possible challenges** they face:

- resistance from the neighbours of families who make the change from labour to learning lessons (the neighbours may question the wisdom of educating children).
- case studies of opposition to the withdrawal of working children (see Appendix A).

This can be done using **methods** such as

- role-play e.g. heated debate between the landlord, the parents and the volunteer as regards the liberation of the working child
- street play showing the two sides of life as experienced by the young children who populate the camps – the oppression in their working lives and the liberation made possible by intervention and persistence (e.g. Bhoomi Thalli Biddalam)

**Teaching classes of mixed-ability :** The diversity of the composition of the camp groups requires a flexible approach to instruction. Teaching in sub-groups allows for students to progress at their own pace in the relevant subject area – different material must be prepared in advance and made available for each group.

**Experiential learning** is both stimulating and effective and so is encouraged wherever possible. The advanced age of the camp children often means that they learn quickly and all children learn better by doing. Activities include:

- games and cultural activities
- stories, songs, etc.
- practical environmental science classes
- field trips to public places: Post Office, Police Station, Railway Master’s office.

**Using texts :** In the initial stages of learning to read and write, the children should be introduced to material in the language of their own region; the textbooks used in the Government schools will not be understood by the children and they will be more familiar with the material in the local language texts. MV Foundation has designed sets of materials for use in the camps as well as co-operating with the DPEP to develop material for use in Government camps and those run by other NGOs.

The usual practice is for the MV Foundation materials to be used in the first 4 months of the short-term camp and then converting to the Government-sourced materials for the final 2 months before entry to formal schools.

#### **1.5. 4 Ongoing training, mentoring and support**

MV Foundation has a resource group, the Curriculum Support and Advisory group,

which meets the camp teachers regularly to offer support, advice and resources. In these meetings, they discuss any problems the children may have. Advice is also given regarding the appropriate use of materials and how to create same. Members of the resource team sometimes conduct classes in the presence of the camp teacher, especially when introducing new material or techniques of instruction.

## **1.6 Practical arrangements**

### **1.6.1 Sourcing accommodation**

In the early days, MV Foundation camps were located in **vacant buildings** given by the community in the villages where the need was identified. There were various types of spaces, including community halls, small huts, etc. Toilets and bathrooms were specially constructed for the camp children.

As the numbers of camps and children grew bigger, the MV Foundation began to work in co-operation with the local people to identify infrastructure which was owned by Government departments but not being utilized. This consisted of **abandoned buildings** and those no longer in use. The local people would ask the relevant Department (e.g. Education, Industry, Irrigation, Public Works) to give permission for the vacant building to be used for the camp. In many cases, abandoned buildings had been part of the infrastructure needed during the construction of roads, dams or electricity supply.

As regards **unused buildings**, MV Foundation's policy is that it is happy to move to other premises if the Department wishes to reclaim and make use of its building for the purpose for which it was originally intended. In one instance, the MVF camp was located in an unused teacher-training center and after some time, the headmaster decided that he wanted to conduct training sessions there. He applied to the Department of Education, the Department officials contacted MV Foundation and the camp was moved to another location.

### **1.6.2 Facilities**

The basic infrastructure required for setting up a camp is:

- Availability of water
- Electricity supply
- Sleeping accommodation
- Separate areas for class groups
- Toilets and bathrooms
- Cooking facilities
- Access to a play area.

If a vacant building (state-owned or otherwise) is not available, any premises considered for rent should have a child-friendly infrastructure.

MV Foundation's local volunteers usually work together to clear up the area of the camp site. This is also a form of mobilization within the community as the people begin to realize how carefully the volunteers are planning for the opening of the camp and the importance given to the work.

**What is the point in pampering these children?** : Sometimes, officials express their surprise at the high standards demanded by MV Foundation in relation to facilities, hygiene and levels of care in the camp. MV Foundation is not a charity, it is an organization which advocates for and practices the protection of the rights of the child. It makes no distinction between children and insists that they are treated with respect throughout the entire programme.

**Auxiliary camp staff members** : are similarly sensitized to the child-friendly principles. Kitchen, transport and para-medical personnel need to be made aware of the importance of their contribution to the overall atmosphere of care and concern for the well being of the children.

***Negative attitudes disable people; positive attitudes empower.***

**A word of caution** : Starting a camp without adequate preparation results in not reaching the genuine target group i.e. out of school children. In some cases, children who are already going to school find their way to the Bridge Course Camps; in order to get a hundred children to a camp, two children from each village in the project area are selected to join the program. They do so because they are promised accommodation and other facilities. These are examples of efforts which ignore the fundamental principles on which the programme is based and they are bound to distort the essence of the RBC.

# **A Guide to Residential Bridge Course camps**

## **Section 2 : CAMP LIFE**

### **2.1 Welcoming children**

2.1.1 *Admission*

2.1.2 Settling in

2.1.3 Initial activities

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### **2.2 Children's participation**

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### **2.3 Parents' involvement**

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### **2.4 Camp teaching and learning**

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2.4.7 Curriculum Support and Advisory group (Resource Persons)

### **2.5 The camp as a training center**

2.5.1 Exposure visits

2.5.2 Myths

2.5.3 How does exposure to the camp change people's attitudes?

## **2.6 General**

2.6.1 Programme Advisory Committee

2.6.2 Healthcare

2.6.3 Penpahad camp – a short profile

## **2.1 Welcoming children**

Each child is special. All children are welcome in MVF Bridge Course Camps. If there are children who have particular needs at a particular time, every effort must be made to provide for those needs. Otherwise, children are regarded as individuals, each having individual rights.

*All efforts are geared towards making the children feel wanted. Relationships of trust develop among the children and between children and staff. An atmosphere is created which encourages the child and promises support when that is needed. This opens the children up to the possibility of growth and development. That is not to say that the children do not work hard; they do – probably as hard as they did in their discontinued working lives. The major difference is that, in their studies, they are working for themselves, their growth and development and their future; whereas in the past, their very existence was a sacrifice to the desires of others. Although some may speak of the “joy of learning”, for most people learning involves discipline, rigorous effort, exercise and repetition. This is no different for the children in the camps as they submit to the exigencies of study and assessment. That they do so willingly is because the atmosphere in which they study is a joyful one.*

-Shantha Sinha

Bridge Course Camps can be residential or non-residential, short- or long-term. Children should be directed to the camp which best suits their needs at the particular time. Considerations are: the age of the child, their background and the proximity of the camp to their home. Short-term camps usually last for six months and cater for children under 12 years of age. At the end of the camp, the younger children can be enrolled in schools and join classes appropriate to their age while older children may choose to go to a long-term camp to continue their studies. The long-term camp welcomes children of the age range 9 to 14 years and can be of up to 18 months' duration. Many children will pass the class VII exams and will be eligible for entry to the formal school at this level.

### **2.1.1 Admission**

Each child's journey to the camps is a story of struggle. Their parents agree to send them only after a campaign and a shift in attitudes in favor of their right to education. These



children come to the camp as a consequence of intensive mobilization in the village on their behalf and they are armed with the confidence that brings. There could be about 15 to 20 children from the same village in the camp or a lone child who has no friends at first. Frequently, if the camp has the capacity to absorb only 100 children, many more will want to join. The camp must be prepared to accept any child and all eventualities.

**No fixed dates for admission:** Since the RBC is linked to an ongoing process of social mobilization, there is no fixed start date for launching the camp. ***There needs to be flexibility in accepting children whenever they are ready to join.*** The duration of the camp is largely dependent on each child's pace and ***they are to continue until such time as the children are ready to join schools in classes according to their age.*** The camp, therefore, must not put any pressure on the children for academic performance and instead should facilitate learning at their own pace.

### **2.1.2 Settling in**

It must be understood that the children who join the Bridge Course camp need a lot of care and protection. It is necessary that the **volunteers** who have been responsible for motivating the children to come to the camps are allowed to be with the children until such time as they feel secure and comfortable. This is particularly important because many children come to the camp after defying the local hierarchy and power structure or questioning the family. They may not have wholehearted support as yet from all the members of their family. These children come with a lot of worries and they need moral and emotional support in the initial stages of the camp. The youth volunteers must be allowed to stay with the children as they are their mentors and friends and feel responsible for their well-being. They need to console them and constantly give them the strength to continue in the camp. This is only a temporary phase until the child and the parents are comfortable with the idea of the RBC and with the idea that children no longer need to work.

### **Guidelines**

- *Treat the child with care*
- *Every effort should be made to bring together children who know each other*
- *Encourage new children to take part in activities*
- *Let the children decide on a name for their group*
- *If a child is homesick, make arrangements to take them home and for their return.*
- *Through the process of play, develop an interest in active learning*
- *Take children on excursions and let them enjoy the experience*

### **2.1.3 Initial activities**

The induction phase entails making children feel comfortable and wanted and giving them a sense of ownership of the camp. Since most of the children in the camp are past the

age of school entry, special efforts must be made to integrate them into the camp environment. These children are full of apprehensions and experiences of struggle, yet they have an intense desire to study and join their peers in the regular schools. The usual method used by teachers is to talk to them and establish a rapport through one to one counseling as well as in group discussions. The emphasis is on drawing strength from each other in a spirit of co-operation. A sense of togetherness is generated through singing songs, playing games and participating in cultural activities.

#### **2.1.4 Adjustment phase**

One teacher takes a group of upto 20 children for the first 15 days. This teacher spends all his/ her time with the group and offers gentle counseling to the children and collects information about each one: his/ her background, family support and previous working conditions and so on (see Appendix B). Each child sets his/ her own pace of getting involved in the camp and mixing with friends and adjusting. This time and space for children must be provided. In this way, they would not all start to read and write on the same date. Unless each child on their own feels the need to start studying, no attempt is made to force or compel them to read and write.

During the adjustment phase, the children see the classroom activities and get drawn into the learning environment. It is very common that within two weeks' time, children begin to demand that they are taught to read and write. In terms of personal development, they grow in confidence and develop a sense of security. The main activities in the adjustment phase are as follows:

- singing songs in the group
- playing games
- making friends and getting to know each other.

The teachers gradually compile case studies on the children – family background, how they came to the camp and any problems they might have. They also enquire about the children's feelings about working while other children studied and whether they notice any change since coming to the camp.

#### **2.1.5 Forming groups**

The teachers meet and decide how to allocate the children to the various groups. This allocation is based on the observations made by the teachers over the adjustment period. Children's learning levels are assessed and they are grouped accordingly:

- A group: those who were never enrolled in school
- B group: those who can read and write up to class-1 standard
- C group: those who have 2<sup>nd</sup> class standard
- D group: those who have 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class standard
- E group: those who are 5<sup>th</sup> class standard and above.

There should be a **special group** for older children who are 14 years of age, especially if there are at least 7 or 8 children in the camp of that age group.

**Orientation group:** children enter this group when they first join the camp. After a period of upto 15 days, they can be included in one of the other groups. If competency is equal, children should be grouped according to age. There should be no more than 20 children per group. See Appendix C for an example of a camp timetable.

## 2.2 Children's participation

### 2.2.1 Forming committees

The adjustment phase allows the children to gradually settle into camp life. Once children are comfortable, they form into committees to ensure the smooth running of the camp. This has the effect of promoting responsibility and gives the children a feeling of ownership of the camp. Initially, the teachers participate and support the committees until they can function independently. Committees formed take responsibility for:

- serving **food and water**
- taking care of **materials**
- **health** matters
- **recreation**
- **cleanliness**

In the initial phase there is also a need for a **security** committee to find out about those boys/ girls who are not able to adjust in the camp and may be planning to leave surreptitiously. Almost every child is a member of one committee or other and the membership rotates every week. In this way, they participate in all the activities of the camp. Examples of initiatives by camp children are:

**Camp bank:** to keep the children's savings in a safe place.

**Letter box:** to take suggestions from those who are too shy to articulate their concerns in the group or for issues of a sensitive nature.

### 2.2.2 Review

Children must also be provided with a forum to discuss the happenings in the classroom, share their triumphs and difficulties with fellow students, give feedback to teachers on how they liked or disliked the classes and so on. Such sessions are to be established both at the class/ group level as well as through the General Body. This would enable even the shyest among the group to open up before all and the teachers must give confidence to every child to talk before a large group. These sessions endow all children with a sense of ownership of the camp.

The review is a central part of the camp's activities and is crucial to the democratic running of the programme. The children hold **group-wise** and **general reviews**. Each

day the children come together in their class group to reflect on the day's lessons. This gives them a chance to talk, to get to know each other and to raise issues. It has the effect of increasing leadership qualities and confidence. The feedback is taken by teachers to be discussed at their review meeting; teachers get to know what exactly the children are learning. In the general review, all the camp can sit together to discuss camp issues e.g. accommodation, materials and other non-academic topics.

### 2.2.3 Evening activities in Mothey camp

The evening activities of the boys in the long-term camp at Mothey illustrate the range and diversity of the programme and the importance of the children's participation. Singing and dancing are prominent features.

#### Evening activities in Mothey camp

A different review is carried out each day. It is preceded by a cultural activity.

**Monday:** the children give a summary of the day's activities in their class groups.

**Tuesday:** two groups combine to review the day's lessons.

**Wednesday:** camp *darbar*: this gives the children an opportunity to talk about any problems they might have e.g.

- *I couldn't understand the lesson in Telugu.*
- *The curry is not enough for us.*
- *The teacher was angry with me.*

The camp in-charge suggests ways to remedy these difficulties.

**Thursday:** one group presents a cultural activity e.g. a play or song and dance.

**Friday:** three groups combine to review the day's activities.

**Saturday and Sunday:** Film on TV.

### 2.2.4 Home visits

It is quite normal that children would like to go home during the early stages of the camp. As far as possible the decision to allow children to go home must be taken by the camp in-charge in consultation with the teacher who is dealing with the child; all decisions are taken on a case-by-case basis. The volunteers in the village are to be informed about the visit of the child. The volunteers would then take up the responsibility of bringing the child back to the camp. Children can go home for vacations just as in other institutions. At the same time, it must be realized that some children may want to continue in the camp and study lest they are engaged in work if they go home. Arrangements must be made to accommodate children in the camp during the holiday periods.

## 2.3 Parents' involvement

Since the camps are located in villages that are reasonably accessible, it is quite possible that parents would want to visit their children. Parents must be allowed to visit the camp anytime that is convenient to them. They often go to a lot of trouble to see their children. Many of them come with gifts - something nice to eat, new clothes, a box or whatever they think the child wants or needs. They need to be encouraged when they visit.

**Precious moments:** Such moments are very precious for the parent and the child. These are occasions when the parents are beginning to discover the joy of parenting and the pride they derive from the fact that their children are studying. Therefore, when they come to visit, it would be wise to invite them to spend the whole day.

When parents are treated with respect, they feel good about their children and the camp. They could communicate that positive attitude in the community later and mobilize other parents to send their children to camp or school.

### 2.3.1 Welcoming parents

#### Do

- treat parents with respect
- invite them to be part of the group
- talk to them about the nature of the work of the camp.
- introduce parents to staff members
- invite them to take food
- impress on them the importance of the child not missing too many days.
- assure parents that older children can also learn.
- take note of the comments and feelings expressed

### 2.3.2 Dealing with angry or anxious parents

There are occasions where children have joined the camps after a lot of struggle within the family, often resisting their own parents. The parents may come to the camp feeling troubled and indignant and want to take their children back home. This happens in the case of either bonded labor children or girls who are older and do not want to get married.

**Pressure from employers:** Parent of bonded labor children come under a lot of pressure from the employer and they often rush to the camp basically to please the employer, to prove to him that they have made every effort to get the child back home. They are afraid of the retribution they may suffer because their child has defied the employer. Parents in this predicament need to be given a lot of comfort and reassurance. In fact, they must be told that the local officials and also CRPF will take care of them and that this tension would be temporary.

### ***Child marriage and broken ‘engagements’:***

The predicament of the parents of girls who have broken an engagement or those children who have protested and taken the courage not to get married is quite complex. Parents often do not know how to renege on the commitment made to the other party and let them know that their daughter would prefer to go to school. They have to be equipped to handle such an embarrassing situation (see case study, Appendix A).

The camp in-charge and the staff must know how to talk to these parents when they visit the camp and negotiate with them without offending them. They must realize that all these anxieties are quite complex and genuine. The parent’s worry about their daughter’s future is immense and therefore, they have to be given reassurance that educating their girl is the best they can do as parents in the contemporary context.

If parents are given confidence that their children will be cared for and that their capabilities will improve, this can help them overcome their initial resistance. They must be given time to become convinced about the need for their daughters to study.

## **2.4 Camp teaching and learning**

Camp teaching requires a level of commitment to the ideals of the programme and the fundamental rights of the children. The vulnerability of the child in the camp demands a response from the teacher; the teacher’s display of care and encouragement strengthens the bond between them. The initial fifteen days of the camp gives the children and teachers time to get to know each other in an informal way and this human interaction lays the foundation for a good working relationship.

### **2.4.1 Teacher and Child – establishing rapport**

The relationship between the teachers and children is a critical aspect of the camp’s success. There is an innate understanding between adult and child as they share the same background and often have grown up in similar circumstances. They relate easily to each other.

### **2.4.2 Classroom activities**

The activities in the classroom at the camp evolve in the process of implementing the programme. The teachers themselves work out most of the activities through peer learning. They must be allowed the space to enjoy teaching and planning for every child.

On some occasions, children may feel inclined not to be burdened with classroom activities. There are also some children who do just about nothing and want to stay away from class. More often than not, it is through discussions among teachers that solutions to such issues are found. The decision of teachers to give children freedom as well as guidance helps children to learn to exercise self-discipline. This is more effective than subjecting these children to rigorous discipline.

The normal practice in Government schools is to begin by teaching the letters of the alphabet one at a time. In the camp, the teacher starts with words which are familiar to the students and then breaks them up into elements which are then combined to form new words. With this method, children are usually able to read and write within 6 months.

### **2.4.3 Teaching children to read and write**

When teaching children to read and write, MVF teachers make use of material derived from the children's own experience - stories, poems, riddles, rhymes, etc. This is less alienating and the children engage with the material on equal terms as they themselves have been part of creating the texts. These texts are then used for exercises on content and grammar e.g. questions on main points of information, completing sentences, etc. This familiar material offers the children the opportunity to work within a comfort zone, which again encourages participation and promotes learning.

**Note:** the relationship between the teacher and the camp children is very important. Trust needs to be built up gradually and carefully. Camp teachers have a background of activism with MV Foundation and have undergone teacher training. The teacher should respect the child; this means: no corporal punishment and no insults.

In order to generate material for teaching in camps, MVF conducted a series of workshops where the textbooks used in Government schools were adapted to suit the needs of the camp students. In particular, the **activities** included in the texts were selected as being appropriate for use in the camps.

### **2.4.4 Out-of-class activities**

Children like to go on excursions and these can be very educational, particularly in relation to public services and environmental science lessons. The children will be happy and will remember the experience. Places of interest to visit in the community could include: post office, Panchayats, police station, the market, parks, the hospital, bank, railway station etc. This is known as open school.

### **2.4.5 Preparing for exams**

The academic aim of the long-term RBC camp is to reach class VII standard; if a student is unsuccessful at the first attempt, a repeat exam can be taken after one month. It is often noticed that in the months prior to the Board examination, there is a studious mood in the camp. Children prefer to study rather than play as if to make up for the all the lost time. They continue in the world of books, reading and writing until 11 p.m. and begin again as early as 6 a.m. The atmosphere is charged with the earnestness of the children who are determined to study and struggle. *Assessment sheets are a useful form of testing in a non-threatening fashion. Progress reports can also be filled regularly without the need for set exams.*

### **2.4.6 Teachers' Reviews**

Teachers' reviews are held every second day at 9.30 p.m. This gives an opportunity to discuss with peers and give or take advice on matters relating to discipline, lack of progress by students and so on. Many strategies evolve from the group discussions e.g. give some responsibility for the child who is not paying attention.

The agenda for such meetings would include

- discussions on reluctant and difficult learners
- innovations in teaching
- sharing of informal as well as formal classroom practices
- sharing of experience in addressing the needs of children from varied backgrounds
- discussing methods and techniques
- writing lesson plans
- creating teaching-learning materials.

On the non-academic side, teachers discuss issues relating to health, children's committees and the arrangements for holidays and festivals.

### **2.4.7 Curriculum Support and Advisory group (Resource Persons)**

Senior and experienced MV Foundation staff hold meetings once a week with the teachers in each camp to

- decide on materials and how to use them
- plan the programmes
- determine the appropriate levels for the children.
- arrange extra tuition in Telugu and maths.

## **2.5 The camp as a training center**

The camp acts as a training and resource center. It is a model for others who wish to replicate the project and an important part of the whole process of convincing people that education really is for everyone.

### **2.5.1 Exposure visits**

Batches of schoolteachers, volunteers and members of the community are encouraged to visit the camp. A structured programme to familiarize them with the basic principles of mobilizing within the community should be organized. They can see for themselves how the hopes and aspirations of older children become manifest in their struggle to be emancipated. In the camp, access to education is not only presented as a possibility – it gradually becomes a reality.

### **2.5.2 Myths**

Some common perceptions such as



- *poverty is the cause of child labor*
- *poor parents are not interested in education*
- *the formal school syllabus is irrelevant to the context of poor children and their needs*
- *older children will not be able to learn*
- *girls have no need of education as their fate is to be married and serve their husband's family*

are proven to be untrue as the visitors interact with the children and staff in the camp. The camp serves as a center to convince everyone of the possibility of eliminating child labor through education here and now.

The girls' camp serves as a mobilization center for youth volunteers as well as others who work for girl children's education. A structured exposure visit to the camp demonstrates to them that even adolescent girls who are already engaged to be married or those who seem to be indispensable to the family sustenance are able to abandon work and join schools.

### **2.5.3 How does exposure to the camp change people's attitudes?**

The following points have been collected as feedback or have been observed as changes in behaviour after exposure visits.

#### **Camp Teachers**

- develop a positive attitude towards the students and learn the need to be patient with them
- learn to be friendly with the children
- learn about children's behaviour.

#### **Parents**

- the visit dispels any fears they may have had
- see a change in the children and begin to feel proud of them
- become role models for other families.

#### **Youth**

- become motivated when they see the camp activities (see *M. Vijaya*, Appendix A)
- are impressed when they hear children describe how they were encouraged to come to the camp by youth volunteers in their village.

#### **Government teachers**

- learn that it is possible to teach without using corporal punishment.

#### **Representatives of local bodies**

- become aware of child's rights
- go back to their villages and create awareness on the issues of child labour and education.

Details of other training programmes conducted by MV Foundation are included as Appendix D.

## **2.6 General**

### **2.6.1 Programme Advisory Committee**

Every camp must have a Programme Advisory Committee which includes members from the Gram Panchayat where the camp is located, schoolteachers, youth and representatives of the CRPF. They convene a meeting once in fortnight initially and at least once in a month thereafter. The agenda for the meeting must include

- the status of children in the camp
- the material support available and the adequacies and inadequacies of same
- the status of health of children
- the general welfare of the children.

### **2.6.2 Healthcare in the camp**

The doctors in the Primary Health Center should make a preliminary visit to the camp and conduct a general examination of all the children in the camp. Children who require specific treatment are to be referred to the hospital for further attention. Subsequently, the PHC doctor must visit the camp at least once a week. There must be a provision for the camp to refer children to the PHC as the need arises. There also must be a special fund in the camp to respond in an emergency.

### **2.6.3 Penpahad camp – a short profile : see box below**

#### **Penpahad**

The short-term camp for girls at Penpahad opened first in 2001 and then it closed due to financial constraints (it was in a rented building). The camp later re-opened due to demand from parents as the smaller children could not cope with the longer distances to the nearest other camps.

The children come from 10 mandals, 4 of these are mandals where MVF is active and the 6 others are aware of the Foundation's activities and would like to engage in the programme.

Children's profiles: 10 Bonded labour, 70 Child labour; including 10 whose parents are deceased.

*Worked as: agricultural labourers, cattle herds, domestic workers and caregivers.*

# **A Guide to Residential Bridge Course camps**

## **Section 3 : MAINSTREAMING AND SUPPORT**

Some of the areas where first generation learners need support would be tuition, homework, adapting to an unfamiliar environment (in terms of language, cultural background, etc.) and adjusting to mainstream life in schools and hostels. The camp also becomes a site of activity at the community level for the promotion of abolition of child labour and the universalisation of elementary education. An important feature of this function is **networking** with other organizations and bodies who are committed to achieving the same results.

### **3.1 Mainstreaming and follow-up**

- 3.1.1 Overcoming obstacles
- 3.1.2 Support from the school authorities
- 3.1.3 Mainstreaming and Government teachers
- 3.1.4 Admission policy
- 3.1.5 Integration
- 3.1.6 Follow up

### **3.2 Retention of children in schools**

- 3.2.1 An act of faith
- 3.2.2 Insensitivity to first generation learners
- 3.2.3 Some problems solved
- 3.2.4 Dropping out because of health issues
- 3.2.5 Corporal punishment
- 3.2.6 Parents and schools
- 3.2.7 School systems

### **3.3 Support Networks**

- 3.3.1 School Education Committees
- 3.3.2 Gram Panchayat
- 3.3.3 Government departments

### 3.1 Mainstreaming and follow up

The MV Foundation experience has been that the integration of children from the camps into formal schools has improved the quality of education for everybody involved.

#### 3.1.1 Overcoming obstacles

The change which occurs in the life of a child laborer when he/ she moves into the area of full-time study is due to the fact that, as students, the children are the focal point in their own lives. Previously, their worth was measured only in the value of their contribution to others' well-being or economic activity. When the children get a taste of this **freedom** from work and sometimes from bondage, they are unwilling to give it up. Even when the system puts obstacles in their way, seeks to exclude or humiliate them, these newly-liberated young people refuse to yield.

An example of one such obstacle is the process of gaining admission to Government Social Welfare hostel provided for those whose homes are located at a distance from the nearest school or college. This process is at best haphazard and at worst discriminatory. Even with the required documentation – photographs, certificates, etc. gaining admission is fraught with difficulty. Part of the function of the Bridge Course camp is to equip the children with the **confidence** to persevere with the application in spite of the lack of support from the relevant authorities. Students willingly submit themselves to this frustrating process knowing that they have the support of the MV Foundation and the CRPF.

#### 3.1.2 Support from the school authorities

The school should be prepared to welcome the children and make arrangements to accommodate them. School authorities can be apprehensive about the capacity of the children to learn. The correct approach is for the school to accept the children with a sense of pride and responsibility. Even though they are obliged to take all children, it helps for everybody to realize that these children's journey to the school has been long and arduous and that this itself is a measure of great **quality**. It is the responsibility of the school to give additional support to enable the children to catch up with their peers.

#### 3.1.3 Mainstreaming and Government teachers

As partners in the process of universalisation of elementary education, the local school teachers are involved in all stages; nothing is done in their absence, which points to the crucial role they have in guaranteeing the programme's sustainability. As it is a new area for most teachers, they need to be sensitized to the factors which have contributed to the exclusion of working children in the past:

- **caste/ class**
- **levels of achievement**
- **language, e.g. tribal children.**

Once the barriers are identified, they can be systematically dismantled.

**New strategies :** When new students engage with the formal educational system, it calls for new strategies to be developed to respond to their needs. This is an opportunity for teachers to review and re-evaluate their approach – it gives the teacher autonomy to plan for the education of each child as they consider the individuality of the characters they are working with. Older children, for example, may need time to adjust to the more formal academic studies but their **maturity and lived experience** may offer compensation in other areas. When carefully planned and managed, the experience can be of benefit to everybody with an improvement in the quality of schools and a consequent shift in emphasis within the system as a whole.

### **3.1.4 Admission Policy**

In the past, schools had no policy for accommodating late starters and were unwilling to accept older illiterate children or those who had dropped out and wanted to rejoin. Children who had been left out through no fault of their own were condemned to join the labour force, never to aspire formal education. The state Government passed an order in 1998 requiring schools to admit at any time during the course of the academic year the children who were withdrawn from work. Provision is also to be made to excuse older children from joining class I by introducing special **coaching classes and bridge courses** to enable their smooth transition into classes appropriate to their age.

The purpose of this order and its implications for universalisation of education needs to be discussed, debated and accepted by the entire education bureaucracy.

### **3.1.5 Integration**

In order for the camp children to be fully integrated into the school system, the processes which the MVF has implemented successfully must be absorbed by the state's educational institutions. The practice of holding children's reviews, for example, is a case in point. When children are accustomed to articulating their opinions and concerns, the discontinuation of such a practice may lead to some disquiet or frustration. On the other hand, schools which can manage this kind of participatory approach then reap the benefits of **articulate** contributions and **well-adjusted** student behavior. Children feel the need to be listened to and it is crucial for their development that this happens.

### **3.1.7 Follow up**

After the enrolment of the camp children in the schools and hostels, MV Foundation provides a **support person** from among the organisers and teachers to help the children to adjust to their new circumstances. Their knowledge of the children and their history enables them to provide

- care
- help with homework and tuition
- advice on personal problems
- advocacy on their behalf with the authorities

- liaison with the families.

These support persons are not teachers and should be available for their own vital work at all times!

The progress of the children joining local schools is followed up through SECs and youth groups. Close monitoring helps to ensure that the children cope with the structured programme of the formal educational institutions. The staff members are sensitized to the background of the children and are encouraged to be kind to them.

## **3.2 Retention of children in school**

### **3.2.1 An act of faith**

The successful enrolment of children in schools reflects the intense **desire** of the parents to educate their children in defiance of the conventional wisdom that they should be sending their children to work instead. The poorest parents aspire for the unprecedented and hope for a future for their children, one which they themselves were denied. They care for their children and are willing to make enormous sacrifices for them. It is their faith in schools as institutions that sees them persist in sending their children - even if the facilities are inadequate and the teacher's attendance inconsistent. This urge of the parents to see their children educated must be respected and all efforts made to make schooling viable for poor children.

### **3.2.2 Insensitivity to first generation learners**

While withdrawing a child from work entails a struggle in itself, retaining them in school is a bigger struggle. Schools have traditionally been insensitive to the needs of first generation learners. Often poor children and their families are harassed by the school authorities for non-payment of school fees, insistence on school uniform, procurement of supplies on time such as textbooks, stationery, educational materials, etc. Children have a right to access these items from the Government as part of the free education programme in the state. Poor people often face this type of harassment when the rules are flouted and the children are **pushed out** of school. The challenge is to make the school a welcoming environment for first generation learners.

### **3.2.3 Some problems solved**

The difficulties faced by the camp children when they move to school and Social Welfare hostels include getting access to certificates and transport as well as the poor standard of living conditions in the hostels. It requires **co-operation** between the parents, the teachers, the local institutions and the CRPF to remove any obstacles to the retention of the children. Gram Panchayats and SECs have been particularly successful in simplifying procedures in relation to obtaining birth, transfer and caste certificates. They have also taken up issues relating to bus timings with the Road Transport Authority. SECs have also sorted out problems experienced by children in relation to attendance for exams – inability to pay fees or indisposition of parents. They also monitor attendance and verify the accuracy of the school registers.

### 3.2.4 Dropping out because of health issues

**Illness of parent :** At times children may be absent from school due to the illness of one of the parents. Children, especially girls, stay back to keep the home going when one of the parents falls ill. These children are not able to rejoin school as they cannot document the cause of absence. It is possible that some parents do not attempt to send their children back to school because of all the misgivings that the parents have about school and its regulations.

**Puberty :** With regard to older girls, they face the peculiar problem of having to be absent for a long period of time when they attain puberty. In accordance with the social and cultural traditions, there are many ceremonies to follow the event and the girl is in no position to come back to school immediately.

**Illness of child :** Even if children are genuinely unwell, parents are sometimes unable to produce a medical certificate. In such cases the members of the SECs should be authorised to take a more lenient view of the situation and encourage the children to rejoin school.

### 3.2.5 Corporal punishment in schools

This practice is still prevalent in many schools and is used routinely. Teachers have no misgivings about using the stick and, indeed, feel that it is a matter of right that they should subject the children to physical punishment. These acts are considered essential to control the children and inculcate in them the values and discipline of learning. There are many children who need help in coping with violence such as this. There must be a **grievance committee** in every mandal, which would address these issues, take stern action and send a message that corporal punishment would not be tolerated. Insults and corporal punishment are the two reasons most quoted for children dropping out of school.

### 3.2.6 Parents and schools

Poor parents are easily intimidated if they have to deal with school authorities. They are unfamiliar with the **procedures** involved in getting birth certificates, medical certificates, income and caste certificates which require them to deal with more than one department.

They are much less familiar with the **rules** of examination, attendance, promotion and procurement of transfer certificates so on. More often than not, their inability to cope with school as an institution has resulted in their children dropping out of schools. On the other hand, they feel more at ease dealing with the employer as they are familiar with all the rules of the transaction and know exactly what to do. While all the rigid procedures are easily understood by parents from families with a long history of school attendance, illiterate parents who are attempting to become parents of first generation literates simply do not know what has to be done.

### 3.2.7 School systems

School systems need to be more sensitive to the needs of the poor and be more

considerate towards them. The essential criterion for including a rule or procedure is to explore whether it has resulted in a child dropping out of school to join the labour force **or** has helped the child in continuing in school in spite of adversity. In the case of the girl child, her survival in a school is even more precarious. All obstacles are magnified since the social atmosphere condones her being illiterate in the first place. This area needs special care.

Often, even the most benign of rules and regulations appear deviously intractable and seem to have been formulated with the sole purpose of preventing any child from joining or continuing in school. People are forced to grapple with the intricacies and quite often the absurdities of the various formal and informal systems that have evolved in the course of managing the schools. It is necessary to modify some of these systems, bearing in mind the specific circumstances from which the children have come.

The proactive role of the support groups in constantly monitoring the retention of children can circumvent some of the restrictions of the bureaucratic and impersonal systems which push children out of schools.

### **3.3 Support Networks**

The mobilisation of the community and the society at large to insist on the child's right to education must result in the creation of a supportive administrative structure and culture. Building this structure requires the co-operation of various groups within the community and outside; we have seen an example of how important was the contribution of the youth in the initial activities of mobilization in the villages. Similarly, the SECs and the CRPF/GRPF have played significant roles in advocating and activating on behalf of working children. As the locally elected representative body responsible for the administration of the community's affairs, the Gram Panchayats are important institutions in the attempt to abolish child labour and strengthen the schools.

The activities of the local youth and the CRPF/GRPF have been described in more detail in Section I. The roles of the SECs and the Gram Panchayats are summarised below.

#### **3.3.1 School Education Committees (SECs)**

The Andhra Pradesh Education Act [1998] provides for a School Education Committee in every school. The role of the committee with respect to bringing children back to school and for the abolition of child labour is as follows:

- to facilitate **admission** of children, the newly enrolled and also older children, into schools by insisting on flexibility in admission procedures
- to identify school **dropouts** and children with irregular attendance, contact the family and ensure that the child rejoins school
- in case of **absence** of children due to adverse circumstances at home such as ill health of parents or children's own ill health, to help in their readmission in



schools without insisting on presentation of medical certificates

- to facilitate the issue of **transfer** certificates to children as and when necessary.

### 3.3.2 Gram Panchayats

The role of the Gram Panchayat is :

- to take responsibility for planning and implementing the programme for universalisation of elementary education by abolishing child labour at village level
- to provide support for those withdrawing children from work and to utilise its offices to engage with the officials to resolve any issues arising
- to strengthen the functioning of the school and support the SEC to prevent children from dropping out
- to mobilise local resources for the school and also to generate resources by lobbying the higher levels of the education bureaucracy
- to press for greater devolution of powers (in accordance with the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment).

### 3.3.3 Government departments

The Department of **Education** must co-ordinate with various other departments in order to reach out to children and protect their rights. Government officials at the district level can create an atmosphere in which the functionaries of every department are motivated to make a commitment to the programme of abolition of child labour. Here are some examples of the areas where the functions of other departments are linked to Education:

**Revenue** has the responsibility of taking a proactive role for identification and release of bonded labour.

**Social Welfare** ensures that specific issues of children in difficulties are dealt with in a sensitive manner in order to facilitate the continuance of children in the hostel.

**Police** must take up issues of child abuse and early child marriages and register cases.

**Health** has an important role to play in ensuring that children do not suffer from lack of access to health care. Clear messages must be sent that physically abused children will no longer be invisible and will be accounted for and treated properly. This would also apply to the Departments of **Women and Child Welfare** and **Labour**.

A concerted effort by all the parties to the process can help the children take up their rightful position as full-time students and hostel-dwellers with dignity and pride.



# A Guide to Residential Bridge Course camps

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The issue of access to education is a contentious one and has been linked in the past to conditions such as economic viability, practicality, tradition or culture. It is argued that society should wait until conditions are favourable before embarking on a programme of universalisation of elementary education.

The working child in the hotel, the field, the factory or the home might well ask ***How long must I wait?*** It is only when these children are seen, when they are recognized as human beings with rights equal to those of others, when they stand up and refuse to accept a destiny which someone else lays out for them that we realize that it is impossible to say that, for them, the wait must go on. In the approach taken by the MV Foundation to the elimination of child labour and the universalisation of elementary education, all activity communicates the message:

**Your time is now; the wait is over, come and take your place.**

The programme is not about giving charity or favour, it is simply acknowledging the right of the child to be free from labour or burden and to have the opportunity to develop their potential in a safe, structured environment. The ultimate responsibility for providing a national system of education for the nation's children must rest with the Governments of center and state and it is encouraging to see that the issue is being addressed to some extent. However, until such time as all the children in the age group of 6 to 14 years are enrolled in fully functioning schools, there is a need to provide encouragement and support to those who are entering the unfamiliar world of the formal school system for the first time.

This is where the Residential Bridge Course camps are used to bridge the gap between the world where education is not even considered as a possibility and the world of books and learning and study. The idea for the camp originated in the interest in learning expressed by older children and the need for a place to accommodate child labourers on their release from work or bondage. The success and popularity of the RBC camps have demonstrated the unreliability of the following beliefs, among others:

- poor parents place no value on educating their children
- children from certain socio-economic backgrounds will derive no benefit from schooling
- older children will not be able to learn
- child labour is necessary to keep the family, the economy and the society going.

The success and popularity of the RBCs have also shown the value of adopting a comprehensive approach to the achievement of the programme's objectives. In order to effectively take up the agenda of universalisation of elementary education, the programme must have widespread community support. Convincing people that education of itself is a good thing is not always easy but it is the essential first step to ensuring that the norm of school attendance gains a foothold in the area. The camp is an example of the theory in practice as the people begin to adapt to a new way of thinking and living.

The DPEP programme for the elimination of child labour also envisages the need to focus the Education Department's functions in the three key areas:

- building processes for community mobilisation to withdraw children from work
- strengthening the school system
- working to retain all children in schools.

These goals have to be accomplished simultaneously. The programme requires an orchestration of all the forces at the village, mandal, and district levels, even at the State level. It involves networking with Government departments, public bodies and elected representatives. The desired outcome is to create a demand for education and then to build the institutional capacities to respond to such a demand.

The experience of NGOs and Government departments over the past decade have shown that commitment and a firm resolve that no child must work and all children must be in schools is an important first step. However, to be successful, it has been found that organization and management of the programme as well as financial autonomy is essential for effective execution. An organisational culture and ethos governed by trust and mutual respect (and not by bureaucracy and hierarchy) is absolutely essential for the successful implementation of the programme.

The responsibility for planning the programme and its implementation and monitoring cannot be seen as separate functions to be done by different agencies. All members in the organisation must perform all the three functions (mobilisation, retention and improvement) in their own sphere of work and activity. Most of the work is taken up at the level of the habitation by the community volunteer who is entrusted with the task of contacting individual households and linking them to the schools and Gram Panchayats.

The volunteers and education activists mediate between the various layers of social hierarchies and power structures. The health of the programme depends on the trust it reposes in the capacity of these workers to plan and implement the activity at their level and in giving all the administrative, cultural and financial support to them to do their work. The next level of planning and monitoring the programme should be at the cluster level and then consolidated at the Mandal level. Accountability in such a system is in-built through the processes of public meetings in which transparency is encouraged and positive feedback is

sought. The members of the community, elected and others, gradually take on the responsibility for the quality of education available in their area; it is in this way that the MV Foundation programme results in the improvement of schooling for everybody and not just for those who have come to school via the camps.

It would be heartening to conclude by saying that the future is here and that the infrastructure and facilities are in place to accommodate all children in well-appointed educational institutions. That is not the reality at present. However, it is true to say that we know what is possible because we have seen it in the camps, in the faces of the children, in the successes of those for whom education had been deemed a 'waste of time'. The challenge for those engaged in the drive towards the universalisation of elementary education is to implement the programme in a systematic and pragmatic manner without losing sight of the ideal.



## **Appendix A**

### **CASE STUDIES**

The response of parents, employers and villagers to the untimely removal of working children from their enforced responsibilities is often characterized by anger, sometimes resulting in violent outbursts as evidenced in the stories told here.

#### **An angry mother**

Sanjeeva Rao, the CRPF Convenor in Penpahad mandal is justifiably proud of his group's involvement in the release of Ramesh, a bonded labour child. The CRPF task force committee is composed of 11 members, including the Mandal Development Officer, Mandal Revenue Officer and the Village Assistant Officer. The task force decided to go to the village to get the child released. At the house of the landlord, the child's mother scolded them for interfering in her business and in a fit of anger she poured sand on Sanjeeva Rao. The MDO spoke to both the landlord and the mother. He told the landlord that he would book a case against him if he did not release the child. The landlord was afraid and agreed.

The mother however, had other concerns. Theirs is a poor family and she did not know how they would cope. The CRPF intervened on their behalf and got an AAI card to allow the family to purchase rice at a subsidized price.

#### **An angry father**

Initially, Krishna and his siblings were enrolled in school. His father was a bonded labourer on a large debt (Rs 20,000). The father left his employer but later returned and was bonded again. This time he bonded Krishna with a landed school teacher. MVF activists approached the employer and met with evasion and false promises – a situation which lasted for 2 years. When there was intense pressure on the employer, he used to lock Krishna in a room.

Once when the activists came to talk to Krishna as he worked in the field, he ran away with them and joined the camp. The teacher/ employer said nothing to the activists but he scolded the father severely and the father turned his anger on the MVF. In his fury, he hit the MVF activist's father on the head with an axe. Although this blow was near fatal, no legal action was taken against the perpetrator and he gradually changed his attitude. In the area, employers have stopped employing child labour.

Another story involved an MLA as the employer; he was challenged to release the bonded child but refused. In fact, he tried to get the police to charge the activists with harassment!

## **An angry landlord**

A child was taken as bonded labour for a loan of Rs 4,000. The support group was asked to meet the landlord. Prior to this, it took almost 3 weeks to convince the parents to get the child released. The entire process took 5 weeks. When the child was taken away from work, the landlord locked the entire family out of their home. The mother ran to the villagers who in turn went to negotiate with the landlord. The discussions went on all day in the presence of a policeman until finally the landlord relented.

## **Angry villagers**

Renuka of Gunjalur village, Chivvemula mandal, aged 9 years, is in the Penpahad short-term girls camp and Rambabu, her younger brother, aged 7 years, was admitted directly to school. Their parents were daily wage labourers. The mother died and the father took to drinking heavily. Ramakrishna, her elder brother, aged 11 years, was also a labourer, working with his father. The father abandoned the children and soon the villagers noticed that they were missing from the village. It transpired that the father had bonded them and had stopped working himself.

Venkanna, an MVF activist, became aware of the family's circumstances and decided to intervene on behalf of the children. He failed to convince the landlord to release the children (the father had bonded Ramakrishna and Renuka for a loan of Rs 10,000). Venkanna enlisted the help of the villagers and the CRPF of which the sarpanch is the convenor.

*The CRPF hired a vehicle to collect the children from the landlord's place but tensions heightened and the villagers resisted this interference. After a debate that lasted all day, the landlord agreed to accept a 'promisory note' for the outstanding amount of the loan. In fact, what they wrote on the note was that it is not allowed to demand repayment of a loan for which a child's labour has been engaged!*

**Ramakrishna:** *My mother was interested in the campaign against child labour but I took no notice. When the activist visited my place of work, the landlord locked me in a room. I am here because the CRPF insisted. My grandmother tried to care for us but she is old and blind. Now the CRPF and the villagers help my family. I have no problem following the lessons in the camp.*

## **Ravi is angry too**

**Ravi** is 13. He speaks first of his sister who had been bonded to a woman who works in a Government school hostel as a warden. "And she is also a tribal," says Ravi in disbelief or perhaps disgust. A loan of Rs. 3000 was taken for which the girl's labour was exchanged and it took one year to have that child released. The tragedy of the situation was compounded by the fact that she had to endure terrible working and living conditions.

Their father sent Ravi to work in the city for a doctor. His duties included washing and



cleaning and cleaning out toilets. His employers beat him regularly. He left one day – by going along with the milkman to the bus stand and then taking the bus to Suryapet. He spent the night in the bus stand and decided in the morning that it would not be wise to go home. Instead he walked 6 km to the police station where he asked the Inspector to take him to the camp, which he knew was nearby. MVF filed a case against the doctor.

In an ironical twist, the same doctor has a son who runs an anti-child labour project. When asked about the case, he replied, “No, it cannot be my father, it must be somebody else.”

Ravi’s grandfather died and he went home for the funeral. His parents did not bring him back to the camp. They put him into employment once more as a cattle herd in the village; he was beaten at home and at work. He told his mother he was running away and he left – again he went to the camp and asked to be transferred to Mothey, some distance from his home. His father asked Ravi to come home for the festival of Sankranti but he refused: I won’t risk going back to work.

### **An angry employer**

Swapna is 10 years old. Before coming to the camp, she worked for a woman employed by the government in an ICDS early childcare center. Swapna was a bonded labourer and spent her time cleaning utensils and tending buffaloes.

All the villagers feared this child’s employer, a member of the landed upper caste. The youth group in the village took up the case and went to the police station and reported the woman’s behaviour to the ICDS superintendent. This superintendent sent a warning to the woman and she relented to the pressure. She would only agree to the release of the child if the balance of the Rs.1200 annual advance (Rs.600) was returned to her. The father agreed, paid the money and continued to work for her himself.

Retribution came in the form of the woman employer’s refusal to pay the MVF volunteer’s mother’s outstanding wages of Rs.200. After a complaint was made to the Sub Inspector of Police, the money was released. Swapna will enroll in class IV in the next village. She hopes to become a teacher. When her father took her back home to celebrate Pongal, she was afraid to go to her former employer’s house.

### **Child marriage**

The engagement between a 22 year old man and a 13 year old girl was completed. The CRPF and the GRPF went to the families to stop the marriage. The bride’s family agreed but the groom’s family wanted to persist or be paid Rs.10,000/- in compensation. After the intervention of the CRPF the groom’s parents came to the camp and attacked the camp in-charge. Finally, the man signed a Bonded Agreement Paper stating that **I agree not to marry this girl before she reaches 18 years of age. If I do, I accept whatever punishment is given.**

## **Experience of a Camp in-charge**

Vijaya's father is a teacher in a private school. He encouraged her to study up to degree level but she discontinued at the age of 18 years. She was unemployed in her village when her cousin who works for MVF told her about a job in the camp at Penpahad, Nalgonda. Her father discouraged her from going for the job, preferring that she stay at home. The cousin spoke to her father to persuade him to let her go on a visit for one day at least. Her father agreed, she went but arrived home late which made her father angry. Vijaya constantly pestered her father to give her permission to let her go to the camp, saying that it was very good there. Eventually, her father agreed.

Vijaya spent 10 days training as a volunteer before being trained as a camp teacher. She taught for two years in the camp and then was sent as a Resource Person to Khammam district to work with SECURE for six months. In Khammam she worked with tribal people only and she was struck by their primitive way of life - based mainly on hunting; they had little knowledge of what is happening in other areas. She also found that their dialect was different to the Telugu with which she was familiar. Despite the many challenges she faced, Vijaya learnt much from the experience and she introduced the teachers and children to the methods used by MVF when teaching in the camps. The major change she witnessed was the activity based learning approach (learning by doing) to replace the use of Government texts which were not effective in learning.

# **Appendix B**

## **ADMISSION FORM FOR NEW ENTRANTS TO CAMP**

### **Admission Form**

Name in full:

Mother's name:

Father's name:

Caste:

Sub caste:

Identification marks:

Village:

Mandal:

District:

Date of birth:

Age:

School dropout?

Class:

Work details:

Date of admission:

Name of accompanying person:

Signature:

Remarks:

## **Appendix C**

### **TIMETABLE**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
6.00 – 6.30	Wake-up
6.30 – 7.30	Bath
7.30 – 8.30	Study hour and health check-up
8.30 – 9.15	Tiffin
9.15 – 9.30	Prayer
9.30 – 1.00	Classes
1.00 – 2.00	Lunch
2.00 – 4.30	Classes
4.30 – 5.30	Games e.g. cricket, carom, chess in groups
5.30 – 7.00	Group review

## Appendix D

# MV FOUNDATION TRAINING PROGRAMMES

MV Foundation organizes training programmes for its own staff and for others involved in mobilizing within the community to withdraw children from work and to mainstream them in formal schools. Sessions on the five fundamental principles of the MV Foundation, known as the non-negotiable principles, form the basis of all these training modules. In the crucial early stages, the emphasis is on creating an atmosphere conducive to the release of working children: this is dealt with in the wider context of social mobilization of the community as a whole.

The following is a summary of training programmes offered by MV Foundation.

Participants	Period	Contents
Youth	5 day-long courses over 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The need to commit to the five principles</li> <li>● Collecting data on out of school children</li> <li>● Survey techniques</li> <li>● Utilising the survey for campaign and identification of potential partners in the village</li> </ul>
Volunteers	3 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Components of social mobilisation</li> <li>● Role of local institutions: School Education Committees and Gram Panchayats</li> <li>● Role of volunteers</li> <li>● Girl child and education</li> <li>● Reading books, articles on the subject of child labour and education</li> <li>● Debate on child labour and education</li> </ul>
Education activists	3 days	<p><b>As above</b> with additional inputs on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Classroom practices</li> <li>● Pedagogy for older children</li> </ul>
Organisers	3 courses of 3 days each over 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Team building and leadership qualities</li> <li>● Basic principles of organization and management of the programme</li> <li>● Basic principles of implementation of the programme and expansion to new village areas</li> </ul>

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Contents</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relevant legislation (Acts)</li> <li>● Establishing committees viz. CRPF, GRPF, Youth Forums, Teachers' forums</li> <li>● Discussion on the need to recognize parents' demand for education</li> <li>● Role of MV Foundation vis-à-vis the community and the government</li> </ul>
Mandal in-charge District in-charge	7 days	Training conducted by specialists with focus on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● team building</li> <li>● qualities of leadership</li> <li>● delegation of responsibility</li> <li>● methods of taking feedback</li> <li>● entrusting new responsibilities</li> <li>● identifying strengths and weaknesses of the team</li> </ul>
Volunteers/Teachers for short-term Bridge Course camps	21 days in 3 stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bridge course objectives</li> <li>● Counselling children and preparing them for student life.</li> <li>● Teaching the alphabet, reading and writing</li> <li>● Teaching basic mathematics</li> </ul>
Volunteers/Teachers for long-term Bridge Course camps	35 days: 5 courses in a one year period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Subject-wise training in planning to teach older children.</li> <li>● Reading texts</li> <li>● Setting up a library</li> <li>● Preparation for public examinations</li> <li>● Preparation for entry to formal schools</li> </ul>

The content of the training programmes for youth and volunteers is designed according to their level of experience in the area of work. In addition to the above, MVF staff undergo constant on-the-job training as well as review meetings and exposure visits. Senior MVF staff members take part in structured training programmes consisting of 2 courses of 3 days' duration with inputs in the following areas:

- Poverty and development
- Role of the state and public action
- Social transformation in India
- Organisation and development
- Education and development

Resource persons for these training inputs are recruited from universities and reputable NGOs.

A detailed account of the training for camp teachers is included in Section I of the Guide under the heading, Teaching volunteers.

## **MV Foundation as a training organization: evolution of programmes**

It must be noted that in all the training programmes, there is a deliberate focus on the fundamental principles regarding the elimination of child labour. The training modules have been developed and modified over time through a process of intensive discussions among the core staff of MV Foundation i.e. those charged with the implementation of the programmes. After every session of training, after every workshop, there is a review carried out and the inputs are modified on the basis of the feedback received. In this way, the training modules are constantly improvised and are of necessity very flexible. Whenever it was considered necessary to seek specialist input, that input was requested from selected outside resource persons or institutions.

Trainings given to partner organizations are summarized in the table below.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Contents</b>
Members of School Education Committee (SEC)	1 day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Structured exposure visit to all components of the programme</li> <li>● Defining the role of the SEC</li> </ul>
Gram Panchayat members	1 day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Non-negotiable principles</li> <li>● Structured exposure visit</li> <li>● Defining the role of the Gram Panchayat</li> </ul>
Govt. schoolteachers	7 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Role of teachers in protecting child rights and abolishing child labour</li> <li>● Role of the BKVV – forum for liberation of child labour</li> <li>● Non-negotiable principles</li> </ul>
Child Rights Protection Committee	1 day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Structured exposure visit</li> <li>● Non-negotiable principles</li> </ul>
Women’s groups	1 day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Structured exposure visit</li> <li>● Girl child rights</li> </ul>
Government officials	1 day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Workshop on the non-negotiable principles</li> </ul>

In addition to the above, training inputs are also given to the members of the School Education Committees and the local Gram Panchayats on how to initiate actions to protect children's rights. These are structured around specific issues that arise in the community. There is also a process of '**peer evaluation**' where trained members form a team which conducts an evaluation of the performance of the SECs and the Gram Panchayats. This peer evaluation is also useful in training and orienting the local bodies.

MV Foundation works in co-operation with the DPEP to train Government schoolteachers on the wider issues of educational policy and development, particularly in the context of the Learning Guarantee Programme.

MV Foundation has deputed its volunteers and senior organizers to projects on the elimination of child labour based on the non-negotiable principles under initiatives funded by Indian and international bodies: DPEP, Government of Andhra Pradesh, UNICEF, ILO and UNDP.

MV Foundation has responded to requests for advice and support by sending senior organizers to projects outside Andhra Pradesh: it has deputed its staff to

- Lok Jhumbush, Rajasthan to conduct long term bridge course camps
- WIDHA, an NGO based in Orissa to provide technical support in launching its project for social mobilization to bring children from work to school
- CARE, Lucknow to help in organizing bridge course camps.

Deputing MV Foundation staff to work with other organizations has enabled them to gain invaluable experience and fresh insights into the implementation of the programme.

MV Foundation training enlists the services of the members of SECs and Gram Panchayats to work as resource persons in other projects on a short-term basis (typically for 10 days) to motivate their peers, especially in the early stages of the programme.