

Scaling Up at State Level through Government Intervention

During 2010-11, the funding for Commitments dwindled considerably as a result of which sustaining its activities, especially activities such as financing to a certain extent of Neighbourhood Centres became an issue. Though the women's groups and groups of persons with disabilities had taken over the day-to-day care and functioning of these Centres and were able to pump in some money from time to time, it was impossible to continue to keep these Centres open without some external support, which is what the Organisation had been doing all these years. At around the same time, the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), the government organization that supervised the disbursement of all schemes, entitlements and programs in the rural areas – with the active administrative support of the women's self help groups in the disbursement of the same – had taken the decision to scale up its work from a few model Mandals in the state (the undivided erstwhile Andhra Pradesh) to cover all the Mandals in all the Districts of the state, including its work in the disability sector.

Understanding the need for an agency like the government to adopt the concept of the Neighbourhood Centre, for larger reach and access, as well as completely realizing the non-feasibility of a private agency like Commitments to continue to run the 8 Centres in its operational area for a protracted period of time, Commitments as an organization took the decision to hand over the management of the Neighbourhood Centres to the government, which the government gladly accepted. As such from 2010-11 onwards not only were the 8 Neighbourhood Centres in the Commitments area adopted by the government but the same was replicated in all the other mandals of the other districts across the entire 23 districts of the then undivided state, where the funding was provided by the SERP to the Mandal Vikalangula Samakhya and Mandal Mahila Samakhya to run the Centres.

COMMITMENTS A PUBLIC TRUST

COMMITMENTS a Public Trust was conceptualized with the primary objective of empowering rural poor from the most backward areas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India. In 2000, the organization recognized and realized that Persons with Disabilities are the most vulnerable among the underprivileged communities of people and took the decision to work with them.

The organization adopted the social approach than charity and hence commenced interventions through social mobilization in eight mandals of the Mahabubnagar district including Kosgi, Dowlathabad, Bomraspet, Balanagar, Maddur, Ghattu, Dharoor and Maldakal. These mandals were identified and selected as areas with a high prevalence of disability among the residents, with grim poverty and vulnerability in general. The Trust also initiated the interventions in Hyderabad city and supporting the Girls with Disabilities.



Committed to Poor & Rural Disabled

Head Office Address

Commitments A Public Trust

Sy.No.135, 4th Floor, Manasa building, Beside TSSPDCL
 Kothapet - Nagole Road, Mohannagar, Kothapet - 500035
 Hyderabad, Telangana, India. Phone: 9140 24056536
 E-mail: commitmentsk@yahoo.co.in
 website: www.commitments.in.

Field Office Address

Commitments A Public Trust

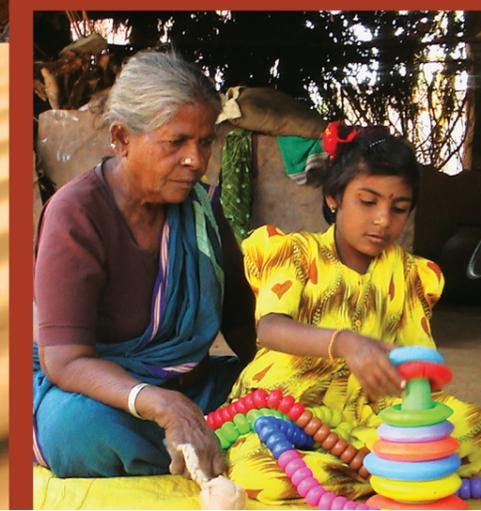
H.NO. 21- 30, Gunj Market Yard
 Kosgi - Village & Mandal
 Mahabubnagar District, Telangana, India,
 Phone : 08505 281556

Neighbourhood Centre

A process note



Neighborhood Centre is a Resource Centre aimed at promoting inclusive development of the Children with Disabilities along with normal children. It is a resource, recreation and also immunization centre, which would provide all kinds of services such as Physiotherapy, Speech therapy, Special education, Activities of Daily Living Skills (ADLS) and also transfer the skills to the parents at one place. It will also provide information on the various Government schemes and entitlements to the PwDs.



Neighbourhood Centre

Background

As part of the work undertaken by Commitments in its operational area as an organization, effectively in 8 Mandals of the Mahabubnagar district of Telangana with persons with disabilities, one of the most innovative projects that came to be defined as the organization's trademark was the setting up of Neighbourhood Centres in all the Mandals where it was operational. So much so that today, the State Government of Telangana has not only adopted it as a very practical, implementable and highly beneficial agency for not just children with disabilities but for all children in the village to access not just entertainment but learn through information made accessible through these Centres. And in addition, these Centres were scaled up to be set up in each and every Gram Panchayat of the state and if and where possible, in every village.



As the saying goes, 'Necessity is the Mother of Invention', this so-called cliché was in fact nothing but the utter and basic truth for the idea behind how the concept of the Neighbourhood Centre came up. During the initial phase of the work implementation of Commitments, when needs assessments were routinely taken up in the operational areas then of 5 Mandals of Mahabubnagar district in order to streamline the work plans for the future to be implemented in the villages of these Mandals for the empowerment of persons with disabilities, one of the most vulnerable groups identified by the activists were the children with disabilities.

The children with disabilities, especially children with severe and profound disabilities required round the clock supervision of at least one adult in the family, most often one of the women of the family – the mother, sister, grandmother or sometimes the aunt of the child with disabilities – be it for feeding them or taking them out for urination/defecation or just to simply keep them company. This meant that every day, one or the other earning member of the family had to forfeit their daily wages to stay back to look after their child with disabilities. As the males earn double the wages as women in the labor market and as anyway men most often balk at the role of a caretaker of a child, let alone a severely disabled child, it was left to the women of the house to remain back with the child, at home. If this was not the case, then an elder or younger sister of the disabled child, who should rightfully be in school was made to drop out, for both the parents to earn enough wages to take care of the family needs, and this was especially true when both the parents had to migrate to earn better income/wages than they were earning in the village.

Context

As Mahabubnagar was and continues to be one of the districts which has the highest number of migrant workers' population due to the regular bouts of drought year after year, another phenomenon that emerged in the investigations of the organization's activists was that most often parents leave their disabled children behind – severely disabled or not – as they consider carrying a disabled child along with them to the place of their migration as too burdensome, where their own lives were in limbo. The parents, thinking that their disabled children were safer with the grandparents they knew than to be left alone in a makeshift tent on the roadside in an unknown city or town, left them with their own parents at the village. Also, there were parents who took their able bodied children along with them, as they thought that even the children could work in the town/city along with them and earn some income/wages, whereas if they took their disabled child along, they would prove to be a burden both on their time as well as finances and so the severely disabled children were left behind with the older generations back in the village.

On the whole, the activists of Commitments found out in their surveys and door-to-door visitations that the children with disabilities were the most vulnerable and affected group within the disability community, which was actually mentioned by the relatives of the children themselves, that they felt very bad about their children and their conditions of life but were completely helpless and did not know what to do, or even think about discussing alternatives with someone and so continued to suffer – both the adults and their children with disabilities – suffer in silence. Out of all this, to break the silent suffering, as it were, grew the idea and recognition of the grave need for a centralized place which could accommodate children in the village, no matter whether severely disabled or not at all, a place which would be on the lines of a day-care centre for the working labourer relatives of the children. At the same time, as children with disabilities were identified as the most vulnerable population of the village, this centre was envisaged to provide as much support, in every form, as possible to the children as well as their family members, in order for them to improve their skills and daily living. From this was born the Neighbourhood Centre.



Over the next 2 years, Neighbourhood Centres were set up in the other 3 Mandals of Daultabad, Maddur and Balanagar as well. At any given point of time, not less than 150 children avail the services of these Centres. Over a period of time, many services were added to what was initially started with such as:

- ADLS
- Physiotherapy
- Speech therapy
- Motivation services
- Persuading / motivating parents to send their children to school
- Persuading / motivating parents to take their children to hospitals

These Centres have also evolved into a regular venue for trainings and meeting places for the local DPOs as there is a sense of ownership with the Centres and as they are quite accessible, they solve the problem for the organizations to look around every time for a regular venue for the meetings. The Centres have also evolved over a period of time as resource centres which contain all the necessary and relevant information as well as the support documents/application forms for the benefit of not just persons with disabilities in the village but to anyone who is in need to access any and every government scheme, entitlement or program.



Monamma's life history is a wonderful example of the tenaciousness of the human psyche and the great reviving powers of good counseling and support system of children and adults alike. Two years before the first Neighbourhood Centre was set up, Monamma was a happily married woman with loving husband and in-laws. Then suddenly, disaster struck from different directions. After a long fight with cancer, Monamma's mother-in-law passed away. Unable to take the loss of his mother, Monamma's husband pined away and hung himself to death from a tree next to his mother's grave. The trauma of these two deaths became too much for Monamma, who became physically ill, to the extent that she became bed-ridden with Tuberculosis of the Spine, due to which her health deteriorated to such an extent that she was unable to move her lower limbs and it began to become progressively difficult to even care for her day-to-day needs.

That was when her own family moved in, her mother, younger and elder sisters as well as her brother-in-law came to stay with her and used to take care of her. They also tried their level best to look out for a medical solution to her malady with no visible result. They even took her to the Government Hospital at the District Headquarters where the doctors examined her thoroughly and told the family members that Monamma would not survive for long and that her days were in fact numbered. That was the point of time that the social worker of Commitments found her as part of her door to door identification of people with disabilities in Monamma's village. The social worker spoke with the Project Coordinator of the Organization and together they decided that Monamma was not a case to be given up on. They first brought her out of her untidy living surroundings and then began a series of counseling by the social worker, where she would sit with Monamma for days on end, just chatting and talking with her. Initially, there was no response from Monamma but with the timely inputs of medication and the counseling support of the social worker, Monamma decided that she indeed had a long life to live and this was not how she wanted to die.

Monamma not only recovered but had become an activist herself, of the local Sangham at Gundumal. Nobody looking at her would even be able to take a wild guess that just a few months before, she had virtually been on the death bed, that she had ever been even seriously ill in her young life. She is hale, hearty and healthy with a spring to her step. She got the job as the caretaker and baby sitter at the Neighbourhood Centre where the children continued to infuse the will to live in her, giving her life a purpose. Though the other members of her group informed her that she need no longer consider herself as being disabled, she decided that she would remain a member until she died as she wanted to continue to work for the cause of the people with disabilities like her in the village, to provide support to others the same way that she had been provided, to find the interest to live again.



just like the children in Gundumal, the children at Bomraspet also needed this kind of a support in the form of a Neighbourhood Centre. They discussed the same with the Commitments team and in 2005, when Ms. Chaya Ratan, the then Principal Secretary for Health visited their Mandal, all the members put in a request to her that as they wanted a permanent place for setting up a Neighbourhood Centre, she should grant permission for them to use the building meant for the Sub-Centre (of the old PHC) which was lying empty now to set up the Centre. Impressed with the earnestness and enthusiasm she was able to clearly see in their intention, Ms. Ratan agreed to grant permission.

The committee and Mandal Mahila Samakhyas members then took over the old PHC Sub-Centre building which was handed over to them by the District Medical and Health Officer for setting up the Centre in late 2005. The Mandal Vikalangula Sangham took the initiative to develop the Centre as the most sought-after place in the village by both children with and without disabilities as well as adults with disabilities. The contribution of the Centre has been to the extent that if the parents of any child who cannot be found do not think twice to go directly to the Centre where they were sure to find the missing child playing with other children there, and this whether that child was disabled or otherwise. The Centre came to be so much of an integral part of each and every family of the village.

In late 2005, Commitments was provided funding by aide-et-action to scale up the work that the organization was taking up in the 5 Mandals of Mahabubnagar to another 3 Mandals from the same district but at a different location, the Gadwal Revenue division. As part of funding the Project, financial support was also allocated to set up the Samardh or Child Development Centres, on the lines of the Neighbourhood Centres from the older operational area was provided. The concept and objectives for setting up these Centres were quite similar to the ones for the Neighbourhood Centres and all of which were based on the concept of David Werner's "Village Disabled Children". The process for setting up these Samardh Centres were also absolutely on the same lines as those for the Neighbourhood Centres. Accordingly, 3 Centres were set up in 2006 at Dharur, Gattu and Maldakal Mandals.

Just as with the Neighbourhood Centres, the main aim behind setting up of these Centres was to create space for children with disabilities to play and learn in a joyful manner and not be excluded from their community but to become an integral part of it, where their non-disabled peers can come and spend time with everyone there and that they also learn. Here the non-disabled children had greater opportunity to interact with children with all forms and severity of disabilities and understand their problems. Just as the Neighbourhood Centres were infotainment centres, so were these Samardh Centres. In addition to the services offered at Neighbourhood Centres replicated here, the Samardh Centres were also places for parents to bring their children who were recently operated upon as part of correctional surgeries and others who required physiotherapy as post-operative care or learning mobility. Children with hearing impairment were taught how to speak properly, they were trained in sign language in order to facilitate the children to attend regular school along with the others for their education.

Some of the other services available in the Samardh Centres included electrotherapy equipment like ultrasound, electrical stimulation and Trans-cutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS), passive limb physiotherapy, active assisted stretching strengthening techniques and Peripheral Nerve Facilitation (PNF) techniques, the last of which are quite useful for persons and children who have recently undergone correctional surgeries and are in need of post-operative care and physiotherapy to increase their mobility. These services were offered at the Centres as the Organisation had taken up the initiative of getting the correctional surgeries done to the persons who required them and as such the post-operative care of those persons with disabilities as well as the responsibility to ensure their mobility is not adversely affected but will actually improve their lives lies with the Organisation and Commitments team as a whole.



One of the greatest contributions of the organization to the overall development of persons with disabilities, especially children with disabilities, as well as bringing actual change in the attitude and behaviour of non-disabled persons regarding the issues of persons with disabilities has been the Neighbourhood Centre, which was initially set up in the Gundumal Village of Kosgi Mandal and replicated over a period of time in the other 4 Mandals of Bommaraspet, Darrur Gattu and Maldakal. Within 2 years, the Neighbourhood Centres were set up in the other 3 Mandals of Doulatabad, Balanagar and Maddur, with the financial support of IKP which sanctioned a grant of 1.5 lakhs for each Mandal. As a result of this activity, around 150 to 160 children with disabilities are availing the various services offered at the Centres in all the 8 Mandals every day. Some of the services being offered at the Centres include:

- ADLS
- Physiotherapy
- Speech therapy
- Motivation services like
- Motivating parents to send their children to school
- Motivating parents to take their children to hospitals
- Venue for regular meetings of the village level DPOs; there is a sense of ownership with the Centres and negates the need for searching for a regular venue for the meetings
- Resource location for all the necessary and relevant information regarding persons with disabilities

The process of how these Centres, especially the first Neighbourhood Centre at Gundumal, actually came into being is given below in detail.

Objectives of the Neighbourhood Centre

The objectives of the Neighbourhood Centre, as evolved by the members of the committee set up for designing and administering the Centre as well as the members of the groups of persons with disabilities and women's groups, were as follows:

- To provide proper recreational facilities for the children with disabilities
- To give proper care and protection to the children with disabilities
- To disseminate information regarding the needs of children with disabilities to the caregivers, family members and others
- To create a greater awareness about disability and its prevention
- To provide facilities for immunization, whenever required, to pregnant women and new born babies
- To provide appropriate and proper rehabilitation for the children with disabilities
- To encourage children without disabilities and children with disabilities to play and learn together, aiming for an inclusive society
- To conduct training programs for social workers and activists regarding the all round needs of children with disabilities

Implementation Process

As soon as the idea of a neighbourhood centre was mooted, it was discussed among the parent members of the SHGs of persons with disabilities, along with the reasons as to why such a centre was necessary but further action was not taken other than discussion amongst the members because there were obvious financial implications to setting up such a centre and the group members had no source of income to initiate such a centre or to run it on a regular basis and take care of the logistics of the same. In spite of this, the discussion about the necessity of a Centre for their children with disabilities was a constant point of discussion with every meeting. Then, some of the members of the local group in Gundumal got the idea to approach the Project Coordinator of Commitments, regarding finding a solution for the problem of setting up a Neighbourhood Centre. The Project Coordinator suggested to the members that they should apply for a dedicated loan, under the Community Investment Fund, to set up the Centre, the proposal for which they could submit to the local authorities of DPIIP, the nodal agency for implementing the Fund.

Human Resources for Setting Up and Administering the Neighbourhood Centre

Based on the suggestion given by the Project Coordinator of Commitments, the members went back to their respective groups and not only discussed among themselves but also with the representatives of the local Mandal Mahila Samakhya, all of whom approved of the idea of applying for a loan to set up the Centre, as they all recognized the dire needs of the children with disabilities in the surrounding villages. Thereafter, a committee was set up to take this process further, with 5 members of the local Village Organization (VO) and 6 members from the groups of persons with disabilities constituting the Committee members. It was also decided that the same committee will also undertake the logistic details and every day running of the Centre.

The committee sat for a total of five meetings, to discuss and plan on how the Centre should be, what it should constitute, etc. The members prepared the proposal for the Centre, with the suggestions from the Commitments team. They submitted the proposal to the Manager of the Community Investment Fund (CIF) of the District Poverty Initiative Program (DPIP) implemented by the Department of Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh, who came to the Grama Sangham and discussed the proposal in great detail and wanted to understand the full implication of starting such a Centre in the village, at the same



No. of children supported by the NHCs in Mahabubnagar District

Sl.No	Name of the Village	Mandal	No.of children
1	Kosgi	Kosgi	30
2	Sarjakhpet	Kosgi	15
3	Dowlatabad	Dowlatabad	25
4	Gokafaslawad	Doulatabad	20
5	Bomraspet	Bomraspet	22
6	Maddur	Maddur	30
7	Renivatla	Maddur	20
8	Rajapoor	Balanagar	20
9	Dharoor	Dharoor	25
10	Ghattu	Ghattu	25
11	Maldakal	Maldakal	30
	Total		262

time to practically see for himself, how strongly the members of the groups as well as the committee felt about setting up a Centre like the one they proposed and whether they had the necessary inclination to run it on a daily basis. More than satisfied with the response of the members and convinced that the Sangham members can take care of a Neighbourhood Centre quite adequately, the Manager of CIF (DPIP) agreed to and got sanctioned Rs. 5.80 Lakhs with the help of which, the Neighbourhood Centre was set up at the Gundumal village of Kosgi Mandal in April 2003.

The committee members ran the Centre, where all the members took an active role in its daily functioning. To facilitate this process, the 11-member team again divided itself into 4 Sub-Committees which were –

- Material buying (Vasthuvula Konugolu) Committee
- Material Safekeeping (Vasthuvula Jagratha) Committee
- Motivation and Encouragement Committee – responsible for motivating the parents to send their children to the Centre
- Cleanliness and Sanitation (Parishubratha) Committee

The members would all meet once every month to update themselves on what was being done, what more needed to be done, where there were problems identified, how to solve the same without disturbing the running of the Centre, whether any additional resources were required and how to raise the same, etc. where the caretakers also participated along with the committee members.

Each member devoted one day of the week to the Centre and ensured its smooth functioning. All the Sanghams, committee members and the Grama Sanghams (VOs) of women took the responsibility for the safe keeping and maintenance of the equipment at the Centre. As there was a requirement for a permanent staff personnel to be present at the Centre all through the day, Ms. Monamma, herself a survivor of a debilitating and life-threatening disability, was appointed as the caretaker and baby sitter, at the Centre.

The Centre worked as a huge source of information to each and every person in the village, while being also the source of recreation, rehabilitation and immunization centre for both children with as well as without disabilities. All the children, irrespective of whether they had a disability or not, were able to learn new skills with the help and support of games, learning activities like daily living skills. The children, with the support of the baby sitter and other members of the committee, prepared their own playing and learning materials, from the locally available resources. Through this process, the Centre became a very good source for stimulating the child's mind as well as her body, contributing to their overall active growth. The Centre was open round the clock, thanks to the presence of the caretaker and the children were given free reign as to when they could come and play and/or learn, in fact they were even encouraged to sleep with other children at the Centre, once they became tired from playing and learning. The idea behind this was to make each and every child in the village, disabled or not, to adopt the Centre as their own, as if it were their own home, that they should accept the Centre that closely to their hearts and minds.

Services Offered through the Neighbourhood Centre

Some of the services offered as part of the Neighbourhood Centre both at Gundumal and Bomraspet included physiotherapy to children with disabilities who required them, especially those who could not develop the basic motor skills like holding things in their hands, how to control their movements, how to carry weights with hands, etc. Those children who required were provided with speech therapy and occupational therapy, the equipment necessary as aids and appliances for all of the above being made available and accessible to every child, including non-disabled children. In addition to this, there were the ADLS skills taught to the children with severe and profound intellectual disabilities, as the severely disabled children were the ones who required the services of the Centre the most, as did their parents. And the parents of the children with disabilities were provided training in whatever the children were being taught at the Centre, so that once the children went home, their therapy could be continued by the family members, so that the therapy did not remain a mere exercise to be undergone at the Centre.

Normally, sports and games for both children with and without disabilities together were held during the occasions of Children's Day or World Disabled Day but as far as the Centre was concerned, these sports and games were held with all the children who came to the Centre together where, irrespective of whether they were disabled or not, all children would play and enjoy themselves together on par with each other. At the same time, the caretaker or other staff members would tell or read stories to the children during the late evenings, just before dinner, after the children had completed their studies and sports, where inspiring tales of national heroes and from Indian mythology were retold to the children. This was mainly the reason why all the children loved to spend time at the Centre and would be loath to go home.

Other than this, the support material, such as information regarding how to access the various schemes and entitlements for persons with disabilities as well as others in the village were also kept at the Centre, so that the family members of the children or adults with disabilities as well as anyone who wanted to get some benefit from the government could come to the Centre and with the support of the staff/caretakers working there, they could fill out the appropriate forms and applications to access the schemes and programs.

Scaling Up – Future Plan

Scaling Up at the Organizational level

Once the Neighbourhood Centre at Gundumal was opened, word spread around to the nearby and far away villages as well, regarding the Centre and the kind of facilities available there for children and how supportive its presence was for the parents of children with disabilities, who were now able to go to work and both the husband and wife in a family were now able to earn a living, instead of one of them having to remain behind to take care of their disabled child. The members of the local SHGs for persons with disabilities as well as the Mandal Mahila Samakhya of the Bomraspet Mandal also came to know about the Centre and they held discussions in their regular meetings and strongly expressed that



Neighbourhood Centre