

The Seventh-Day Adventist School for the Speech and Hearing Impaired

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Kollegal School for Speech and Hearing Impaired is located in a rural setting just outside the town of Kollegal in Karnataka, India. Funded by Asian Aid, Australia, and Child Impact International and operated by the Adventist Church, it is a boarding school with one hundred students.¹

Developments that Led to the Establishment of the School

In 1994, the Karnulaya School for the Deaf and Mentally Retarded was being run by a Lutheran pastor, Father Zachariah, with three teachers: Mrs. Kanthamma (in-charge), Mrs. Gowramma, & Ms. Lalitha. In a rented house in Kamagere, the school began with 5 deaf students (Sundramma, Suresh, Vinod, Savitha and Harishya) and two mentally retarded students. After two years, Mrs. Kanthamma and Ms. Laitha were sponsored to go to Bangalore to enroll in a one-year special training course for teaching the deaf (1995-1996). Mrs. Vasanthi was then the caretaker of the school.²

Founding of the School

Mercy Kumar, Asian Aid director, visited the school in early 1996. Later that year, Father Zachariah, opened the Home Based Services for the Disabled, intending to close the deaf school due to financial difficulties and the poor transportation facilities for the children located in remote areas. During this time, the teachers visited the children's homes to train them. When Mrs. Mercy Kumar discovered on her second visit that the school had closed, she was determined to do something about it. She talked to Helen Eager and got in touch with Mrs. Kanthamma and the other teachers. As a result, the school restarted on the same premises on June 17, 1997 under the new name Asian Aid Deaf and Dumb School.³

Student Enrollment, Faculty and Staff

The school began with twelve students in 1997. Between April-May, the teachers took a survey and by the next academic year, the strength increased to twenty. The school was completely owned by *Asian Aid* and run by Mr. Anand, the principal of the Seventh Day Adventist School, Kamagere. Enrollment kept increasing, and by June 1999, there were fifty students. In September, the Asian Aid directors, Mr. and Mrs. B. C. Kurian visited the school for an evaluation after which they appointed Mr. and Mrs. Srivel Panicker to be in charge.⁴ In January 2000, the school had nearly 70 students with 6 teachers and helpers.⁵ The school moved to Kollegal and opened with 62 students in 2002. By the academic year of 2005-2006, there were 43 boys and 36 girls⁶

In the year 2006, the Asian Aid Board made an MOU with the South-Central India Union of SDA (SCIU of SDA), Bangalore, which gave them complete management of the school with Pr. D. Padmaraj, president of the SCIU, as the chairman of the school board. The strength of the school gradually increased till the hostels became congested. Soon there were about 70 students in the hostels and about 8 students who traveled daily from their homes in Kollegal.⁷

There are 87 students attending the school, 81 Boarding students and six day students from the local community. 60 students were studying from Lower Kindergarten to grade nine, 22 students in the 10th Standard (Karnataka State Board Secondary Leaving Certificate [SSLC]) and five students are enrolled in the ITI program and Vocational training course in Bangalore and Mysore. As the school is predominantly a boarding facility, they currently only accept students over four years of age into the Lower Kindergarten (LKG) class.⁸

Name and Location Changes

In May 2001 the Asian Aid Deaf and Dumb School was temporarily shifted from Kamagere to Kaliyur (SDA Primary health center building) due to water problems and the unsuitable condition of the rented building. The Asian Aid directors, Mr. and Mrs. Kurian, started scouting around Kollegal for an appropriate location to construct the school. During one of their visits, Mrs. Kurian, had a conversation with Thyagaraj David, the principal of the SDA High School, Kollegal, and found that he was willing to give them three acres of land on the outskirts of the town. Kollegal is situated approximately 60 km from Mysore and 150 km from Bangalore.⁹

Asian Aid US and Australia sponsored the new school building's ground floor which was completed and inaugurated on August 20, 2002. It was renamed the Seventh Day Adventist School for Speech and Hearing Impaired. One and a half acres of land was to have a boundary wall and the balance of the 2 acres would have fencing around it to protect against cows and goats, on which were planted fruit trees and provision made for more agriculture. At the time, it was the only Adventist deaf school in the world. The medium of instruction was changed from Kannada (local language) to English under Mr. and Mrs. Panicker.¹⁰

Changes to the Physical Campus

After the construction of the building in the new location, the strength of the school increased rapidly. Plans were made to build the second floor since the girls' hostel was small and the boys' hostel had not been constructed. Funds were collected and in 2005 the second floor was completed. It was inaugurated on November 21, 2005 by Mrs. Helen Eager and Mr. B. C. Kurian, the out-going Asian Aid director. Pr. P. V. Prasad, the new director of Asian Aid, was also present.¹¹

On November 21, 2005, Asian Aid, with Dr. Chapman from Australia, contacted Rotary International, Australia, and made provision for building two sheds to house the Vocational Training Center. The infrastructure and equipment for training the students gradually increased with the inclusion of a Portable Audiometer with a computer and a group hearing aid system (hardware system) given by Dr. Chapman.¹²

Curriculum

The medium of instruction in all classes is English. The second language taught for the primary students is Kannada. The school believes in the total communication model of education for the students and thus utilizes ASL (American Sign Language) but is now moving to Indian Sign Language (ISL).¹³

It supports classes from Lower Kindergarten to 10th Standard and provides students with access to basic library, computer, and science lab facilities, with bi-weekly computer classes being conducted as a central part of the curriculum for grades five to 10th standard.¹⁴

Kindergarten Classes include: Moral Instruction, English & Rhymes, Conversation, Story Telling, Writing, Spelling, Activity, Number Work, Drawing, and Speech Therapy.

Std. I to IV includes: Moral Instruction, English, II Language (Kannada), Mathematics, Conversation, Story Telling, Environmental Education, Drawing, Speech Therapy, and Physical Education

Std. V to IX includes: Moral Instruction, English, II Language (Kannada), Mathematics, Social Studies, Geography, General Science, Computer Science, Speech Therapy, and Physical Education.¹⁵

In June 2003, a Tailoring Unit was opened for the bigger boys and girls to equip them with vocational training. The students were given training in sewing, hand-embroidery, doll making and paper-flower making. In addition, students may learn cooking, plastic wire weaving, drawing, painting, etc.¹⁶

Extra-Curricular Activities

Aside from regular classes, students regularly participate in choreography, pathfinders, religious services on the weekend, arts and crafts classes, field trips, sports meets, science exhibitions, cultural programs, leadership development programs as well as programs to instill social responsibility, such as health and temperance rallies, and volunteering to distribute food packets to flood affected victims.¹⁷

Management and Support

The school is in the area that comes under the South-Central India Union, of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-Day Adventists and is supported by the Helping Hand Welfare Society, with international funding partners Asian Aid, Australia and Child Impact International, U.S.A.¹⁸

Historical Role of the School

Between 10-60 million people in India are affected with varying degrees of hearing impairment, many of them residing in rural communities.¹⁹ Kollegal is a small community of about 57,149 people.²⁰ Although deafness is quite common in the area due to cultural practices of marrying within the family, it is still poorly understood, and deaf children often experience prejudice, discrimination, and fewer opportunities. The school's special needs children are mainly from poor rural areas who would have no hope of a special education.²¹ This is the only special school for speech and hearing-impaired students in the district. And as such is a vital resource for the local community.²²

Many of the students at the school are above 70 percent deaf in both ears. Every pupil seeking admission is first tested by an audiologist after which admission is granted temporarily until a sponsor is found. The children are welcomed into school grounds that encompass well-constructed buildings with surrounding vegetable gardens.²³ For 26 years, since 1994, the school has provided a nurturing home to over 180 students. The school is where they have a voice, it is a place where they are understood, where they can be individuals of their own, a place where they can be heard.²⁴

The school supports a Vocational Training Centre (VTC) to equip students with additional practical skill-sets. It also maintains long term relationships with local Vocational Training providers in Mysore, Coimbatore and Bangalore, for services not offered through the school, so that students who are not academically inclined can equip themselves for future employment.²⁵ Relationships with the students extend beyond graduation. Sponsorship is given to students for higher studies.²⁶

Kollegal's management and sign-language-trained staff deliver a special-needs education that is Christian based.²⁷ The school has yearly visits from Canadian Deaf Ministries or the Gospel Outreach ministries to the deaf, U.S.A.²⁸

Mission Statement

"To provide qualitative care and training for the speech and hearing-impaired students and create an atmosphere congenial for the development of communication skills and learning that would equip them for service to society and minister to their spiritual needs showing the way to eternity."²⁹

More than eighty alumni are either working in companies in Bangalore, Mysore and other parts of Karnataka or doing their higher studies. In the last 12 years about 15 students and staff have accepted Jesus as their Savior.³⁰

Kollegal urgently needs a new dormitory building to accommodate the boys who are currently housed in the main building, which does not meet government housing requirements.³¹

Recognition

This institution is recognized by the Office of the Deputy director, Government of Karnataka, Department of Women and Child Development, Chamarajnagar District Under section 51.52 of persons with disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & full Participation) Act 1995.³²

In the last six years the results of the outgoing SSLC students have been 100 percent.³³ The school is working on obtaining permission for recognition from the Karnataka Board of Secondary Education to run S.S.L.C Section.³⁴

School Principal Chronology³⁵

Asian Aid Deaf and Dumb School (1997-2002)

Anand (1997-1998); Srivel Panicker (1998-2002)

Seventh Day Adventist School for Speech and Hearing (2002-)

Srivel Panicker (2002-2008); Thyagaraj David (2008-2009); Joseph K. S. (2009-2011); Mohan C. P. (2011-2012); Jacob Bhaggien (2012-2015); Varadaraju H. (2015-2016); Jacob Bhaggien (2016-)

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