TRAINING THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUP

Self-help group for the mentally retarded aims at training of the mentally retarded through daily and weekly self-help group meetings. The specific areas of training are cognition, language, motor development, self-help skills and socialization.

The emphasis in this training programme is on individual needs of the mentally retarded and the Individual Education Programme (IEP) is followed. The common needs of the group are covered under Group Education Programme (GEP). The training is carried out with the help of parents; and the parents are guided to train their wards at home using the same methods as used in the daily self-help programme.

Each child joining a particular self-help group, is assessed by the teacher with the help of parents and the specific areas of training required are identified. The assessment is carried out through a 'Portage checklist' translated into Kannada language and adopted to the Indian conditions by Seva-in-Action, Bangalore. These checklists are under publication. While the common areas or skills in which the entire group requires training is covered by the GEP, individual needs are covered by IEP.

The daily self-help group meetings are conducted by a trained teacher with up to three parents in attendance. The routine of the day starts with assembly and prayer recitation. Each child gets a turn
to recite the prayer in lead, which others repeat. This is followed by marking of attendance which is done by the pupil and not by the teacher. Each child points out to his or her own photograph and calls out his/her own name. Then they point out pictures of others, calling out their names and pointing them out. Each of the pupil calls out the current time, day, date, month, year and the season. The teacher assists where necessary using a calendar. Each child wishes the teacher and others present.

After assembly, the curriculum begins with recaptulation and fresh lessons. After about one hour of curriculum, the children undergo physical exercise training and play games. Some of the children with disabilities undergo yoga therapy. The exercises and games are designed to improve motor development. Children of higher age group and those without physical handicap are allowed to play games as normal children would do.

The physical exercise is followed by a half hour recess and children are allowed to be on their own. Some children are taught self-help skills, based on individual needs. After the recess, one more hour is spent on academics and vocational training. Children of higher age group are taught simple vocational skills, which vary with each self-help group. The local employment opportunities more or less decide the type of vocational training. However, vocational training teachers are not employed and children who can move about independently are encouraged to join the
factory or enterprise for acquiring vocational skills, rehabilitation being the aim.

The daily routine is loosely structured. Self-help skills and socialization are taught at any time during the daily routine. Intimate knowledge of the needs of the children, and their individual needs, allows the teacher to pay attention to specific areas of training.

The IEP is worked out after initial assessment. Task analysis is carried out for each activity by the teacher with the help of parents. The involvement of parent(s) is vital as children are taught for an hour by the parents. Programme is continuously monitored, reviewed and methods changed where necessary.

GEP is for the group as a whole, for common activities. Task analysis, continuous monitoring, review and changes, if necessary, of teaching methods and teaching aids are carried out.