

Over the past months, Kidpower India has held 11 workshops with children and teens. These workshops contained both private groups as well as groups of children from an orphanage run by NGO, girls from a girl care centre run by NGO, a group of girls with a hearing disability, a workshop for schools, and a presentation for a large audience of 1,000 girls from rural backgrounds as part of a government organized program. We are looking forward to many cooperation and workshops in the year 2009.

On the 13th of November a workshop was conducted for children from various schools. In this workshop, 28 children from five different schools participated. They were briefly introduced to how they would learn to use the power they already have to keep themselves safe! For two hours the children were engrossed in learning safety skills and self protection. As this was a totally new concept for the children, they were quick to respond and learn. The skills were taught

through role plays, group practice and individual practice. The children expressed their happiness at being taught these safety skills as they felt it was the pressing need of the moment. They also had a lot of fun during the workshop! We were overwhelmed with their interest to learn more. Participation certificates and brochures were distributed. Our first work shop with the students was a huge success!

On the 19th of November a conference on Child Safety and Protection was organised. On this occasion people from various sectors were invited. The topic was discussed from several angles including legal, academic, social and practical point of view. Around 35 delegates from schools, special schools and NGO's were present. Some of the thoughts shared during the conference are as follows:

a. From the 2007 report on Child Abuse (published by the Government of India) it becomes apparent that there are high rates of both physical, emotional and sexual abuse prevalent in India and that children in the age group of 5-12 years are comparatively more affected.

b. Abuse not only affects a child's health and well being but also his or her process of self development. Children usually withdraw from friends. Their self esteem can be affected leading to a low self esteem. They may also turn hostile and aggressive, which could lead to delinquent behaviour.

c. It is essential to build a protective environment, in which children are protected from violence, exploitation and abuse. Prevention is so much better than reacting after it has already happened.

d. Child safety and protection should be included as part of the school curriculum to create awareness amongst school going children about their rights.



Working Group during discussion time

e. Child protection policies need to be implemented in schools and work places and a concentrated effort is needed to work towards creating a protective environment for children.

f. Children can benefit from training in safety skills. The training should maintain a delicate balance between protection from harsh reality (in order to avoid instilling fears) and learning how to deal with reality in a positive approach by building skills to protect oneself. One of the aims of the training is that children can see themselves as strong, valuable and capable of breaking away from unhealthy patterns. Another aim is that, they learn how to ask help from adults and make adults listen to them.

g. It is also important to help children reach their full potential as part of education, as mentioned in the Convention of Rights of the child. To give children challenges and encourage them to develop positive thinking, can enhance their potential and self-confidence. This will empower them to use more effectively the abilities they have. Changes are necessary to improve safety of children.



Phaedra and other speakers at the Child Safety and Prevention Conference

At the end of the conference we had an interactive session where the participants got to know each other better and voice their opinions and pledge their support to prevent any form of child abuse. It is our fond hope that the delegates took back adequate information on how they could help society in the prevention of child abuse and also a positive outlook towards working on child safety. Many people attending the conference were very appreciative of our work and were asking for regular workshops of this kind to be organised.

NEWS BYTES: ACID ATTACKS & SAFETY OF YOUNG WOMEN----->

On December 10, 2008 two 21 year old Engineering students Swapnika and Praneetha were attacked with concentrated sulphuric acid in Warangal. Swapnika sustained 55% 4th degree burns on the face, scalp, neck, both hands and her right leg. She lost her eyesight completely in the attack. She was admitted in hospital in a very critical condition. Her friend Praneetha also had her face injured and was in a slightly better condition. The attack was allegedly done by one accused Srinivas accompanied by 2 friends on a motorcycle, while the girls were returning from college. After a battle of 20 days for life, Swapnika died in the hospital.

Over the last few years there have been several incidences of murder and/or acid attack on young women for rejecting advances. Reason for this behaviour next to psychological imbalance can be related to ego, not being able to take no for an answer and not respecting the boundaries of the other person. Next to the obvious responsibility of young men to behave respectfully with the other sex, it is also important for adults in the lives of these young men to take responsibility for discussing and guiding them in these matters, ideally from an early age onwards. This role can be fulfilled by parents, teachers, other family members and other people that are concerned with safety and psychological well being of young people.

Some people voiced that safety of women and girls is only discussed when such incidents happen. However the issue should be discussed all year round. Until now sufficient and continued attention has not been given to building this type of social skills in young people, especially in those young people who have difficulty with these matters. It is true that the legal system, police and other authorities play a role, which could also become more efficient. However, the social system also plays an important role. Any attitudes which favour men or boys to cross the boundaries of women should be discussed and discouraged in order to create a safe environment of everybody. Creating such a safe environment goes beyond this specific issue to ragging and or eve teasing in general and other types of situations at colleges where boys are also on the receiving end.

Colleges can take preventative safety measures. One suggestion is to set up complaint cells in colleges so that such issues come to light before taking a fatal turning. It is essential to take any complaint a girl makes very seriously. Another measure is to appoint a permanent psychologist. There was a G.O. issued in A.P. that all junior colleges with a number of students above 500 should appoint a psychologist. This has not been implemented till date.

It is essential for any concerned individual and organization to make their voices heard and to take any actions possible for maintaining safe environments of youngsters in Andhra Pradesh, and similarly in the other states of India. KidpowerIndia is planning to launch Teenpower training to colleges in Andhra Pradesh in 2009.

Kidpower India extends best wishes for 2009 to all. We wish that child protection and safety will be in focus for the coming year.