

# Early Intervention in Inclusive Education in Mumbai

## The 'Why' and the 'How'

### Manual 4

## How to open a Mahila Mandal (A Women's Empowerment Group)



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## Foreword

The '*How to Series of Inclusive Education*' is a set of manuals that have emerged from a study undertaken by The Spastics Society Of India, Mumbai in collaboration with UNICEF and supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The title of the project is *Inclusive Education Practice in Early Childhood*. It is an action research project involving both intervention and research on a large scale covering 6000 families based in the impoverished areas of the Mumbai slums. Six hundred children, both disabled and non disabled, were placed in Demonstration Learning Centres within the community where an enrichment programme and a need based intervention was given over a two year period. The intervention strategies were carefully documented and the progress of the children tracked by external researchers not connected with the intervention team. The aim was to study the mechanism or *intervention* strategies needed to put *children with disabilities* into existing programmes being run by Government and non-Governmental agencies and the barriers that came in the way to accessibility and participation.

From this evidence based research emerged a series of instructional resource material: the '*How to Series of Inclusive Education*.' These manuals are relevant for any organisation, or agency, working to address the crucial need of bringing *children with any disability* into inclusive settings. They recommend *a whole community approach to inclusive education*, and although the research was carried out in India it can be used anywhere in the world.

## What is a Mahila Mandal ?

A **Mahila Mandal** consists of women living within a community, who are motivated to develop their community to empower them.

## How do we create a women's group ?

The main question : How do we create a women's group and who are going to be the group members? Usually a Mahila Mandal consists of all the women living within a community. Hence it is very important for every mother present in the community to be a part of the Mahila Mandal. There may be some mothers who, apart from looking after a family, are working women too and hence require immense encouragement and motivation. It is the Mahila Mandal that provides that extra boost and encouragement to such mothers. Therefore in order to sustain a women's group or a Mahila Mandal, motivated women and women who think about the development of their community are required.



## Topics of discussion at Mahila Mandal meetings

- To evaluate the progress of the child attending the pre-school and factors related to it.
- To discuss issues related to their home environment.
- To obtain information on their source of income, education levels and their interest in getting training.
- To identify members who could be initiators and could actively participate in sustaining the group.



## How do you form income generation groups ?

- Identify **group members** who are interested.
- Decide on **items that can be made** by most e.g. diyas, candles, toran, hairclips etc.
- Give **training** to create these items/products.
- Keep **costs low** in the production of the items/product.
- Work out **marketing strategies** to sell these products.
- Give information on the various **saving bank accounts, postal services, daily banks and bank grants**.
- Give information on **how to save finances**, monthly or weekly, and the process of gaining access to a bank account.
- Set up a **small savings group** in their existing Mahila Mandal group to which they can contribute at the monthly meeting.
- Empower them and make them aware of **existing rights for women and girl children**.



## How do you market your products ?

All the members in the group should ultimately focus on the source of income and how to increase it. Hence a list should be formulated on all the items the various members can make. Once the items are short listed, certain members in the group may be unable to produce such items and hence training may be required. However it is very important to keep in mind that cost-effective items should be made which require less funds and produce more revenue. Marketing strategies to sell these products should also be thought of in these meetings.

- **Arrange exhibitions or door-to-door marketing for the sale of products to generate an income source.**

- Market and sell particular products on particular occasions such as:

- ✓ Decorative diyas for Diwali
- ✓ Candles for X'mas,
- ✓ Decorative flowers and flowers sticks for different festivals.



## How can the Mahila Mandal help in community development programs ?

- Through various festivals and community events to create awareness on community issues, such as child marriages, dowry, and health and hygiene and education for the girl child.
- Through discussion of issues such as abortion and its harmful effects, contraceptives, the girl child, atrocities against women.
- The importance of education should be stressed.
- Through these programs, adult literacy classes could be conducted. Families from the community should be approached to give their room on rent to conduct the classes.
- The Mahila Mandal could use slogans, street plays, puppet shows and demonstrations to spread awareness on health, hygiene and social issues.

## What type of workshops can be conducted ?

- **Health and Hygiene** - Guidance about health problems by experienced doctors from health clinics to the Mahila Mandal.
- **Education** - Spreading awareness and importance of education specially for the girl child, and of pre-school.
- **Nutrition** - Discussion about the importance of nutritious food during pregnancy, as well as the type of food and baby care, that has to be given to children from 0 to 5 years old.
- **Personality Development** - Programmes for the encouragement of different skills and arts, as well as competitions e.g. cooking competitions, rangoli, speech, essay writing competition, plays, etc.

## What information on disability the Mahila Mandal can provide ?

- Women can be educated about the **causes of disability and what sort of preventive measures may be taken.**
- "The Home" and the impact this environment may have on their children can also be discussed. **Problems faced on the home front maybe dealt with by collectively thinking of a solution.** This process not only brings about objective solution but also provides immense support to each woman in the Mandal.
- **Problems involving disabled children not being provided with the appropriate intervention and education,** the negative attitudes experienced by the disabled child and the mother, an alcoholic parent, child abuse and neglect, financial burden and in certain situations an unemployed spouse can be discussed. There are times when all these factors operate simultaneously.

## What benefits do women get from Mahila Mandal ?

- The Mahila Mandal **provides a common ground** through which issues such as the girl child, disabled children and the benefits of education may be discussed.
- The Mahila Mandal can also provide a **platform through which women would voice their opinion** on what is right for their children, whether this involves a girl child, a disabled child or children who are neglected.
- The Mahila Mandal **provides a support system for women** through which they can collectively work towards solving their problems and bring about changes in their family and community.
- The training that is given to the Mahila Mandal group **helps them to earn Rs.30 to Rs.40 per day.** The women can do this independently by marketing and selling products.
- Women can **join other NGOs in the community** like "Sneha, Kripa Foundation" through which they can get orders for their products.
- Mahila Mandal can **join other women's groups within their community** for any social issues to be dealt with like: dowry, child marriage, and physical abuse. An example is SHED (Society for Human and Environment Development).

## Mahila Mandal - a platform for learning and sharing views

