



Friends Society
(established 1969)

ANNUAL REPORT: 2019-20

(July 1, 2019 to 20 March 2020)

(Note: this was a shortened year - about 9 months - due to Corona Virus lock-down)



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Golden Jubilee Celebration

Friends Society completed 50 years in 2019 providing services to Vadodara community. A golden jubilee celebration function was organized on 30th December 2019 to celebrate this milestone.

The function was attended by 167 members from different parts of India and the world. It included a slide show on FS activities in different decades, sharing of experiences by members, and felicitation of the organisations and individuals who have been a constant support to FS over the years. And, most importantly, it was a reunion of “old timers” and an opportunity for them and the newer, younger members to meet each other, and for all to celebrate together.



IMPACT OF FRIENDS SOCIETY

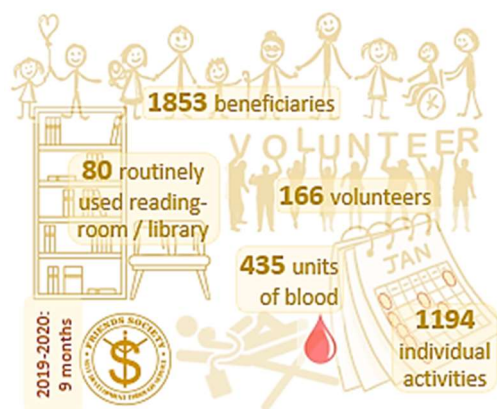
For over 50 years, Friends Society has been making **significant difference in lives of hundreds of people every year** – those who attend our activities (beneficiaries) as well as volunteers who conduct these activities.

DURING THIS YEAR (2019-20):

(Note: This year was shortened due to the Corona virus related lockdown - FS had discontinued activities on 20th March. Therefore, the data presented below are for **nine months**)

SCOPE of our work (activities)

- **1,853 beneficiaries** (50% were children; 30% were patients benefitting from blood collected; 12% were student volunteers realizing skills enhancement and gaining variety of experiences; remaining were women and other people in the community)
- **435 units of blood** were collected in 9 blood donation camps organized in colleges, hostels, and industries in Vadodara; we estimate that at least 566 patients in the SSG Hospital benefited from this blood collection.
- **1,194 individual activities** were conducted with a combined total of **77,011 hours** (this is equivalent of **26 years** of 8-hour days).
- Around **80 people** from the surrounding communities used the reading room and the library that FS operates. The Petit library was open for **111 days** and the reading room for **222 days**.
- **166 volunteers**, who were mostly college students, had conducted service activities and participated in various FS initiatives; they spent a total of **12,219 hours** doing so (this is equivalent of over **4 years** of 8-hour days)



IMPACT of our work

Children with disabilities or from low income communities: (Cheer Up, Sunday School, Youth Club, Shaurya, Balwadi)

- Increased self-confidence and hope for the future
- Brought joy and happiness to them through music, dance, arts and crafts, games, and sports
- Helped them develop skills – physical skills (such as eye-hand coordination) and personal skills (social skills, patience, public speaking, teamwork, etc.)
- Celebrated major occasions (Independence Day, Republic Day, Navratri, Christmas, Rakshabandhan, etc.) and helped children feel a part of mainstream society, particularly those who are orphans
- Helped enhance their education through supplemental education activities for math and reading
- Increased their knowledge of various health topics
- Improved health through dental and other health checkups
- Improved their well-being through physiotherapy, music therapy, and art therapy when needed

Women from low income neighborhoods: (Sewing & embroidery classes, Mehndi classes, Beauty parlor classes)

- Provided variety of vocational skills to be able to supplement their family incomes, or increase chances of getting employed with the help of skills acquired and the certificates from FS
- Increase in their self-confidence and self-image
- Increase in their knowledge of health related and various topics that impact women

- Opportunity to meet other women and develop friendships and engage in fun activities such as going on picnics and trips

Patients at the SSG Hospital: (Blood donation camps)

- Make available blood for medical treatment to the patients at the government general hospital (SSG)
- Educate people on the value of blood donation and debunk any misinformation they may have
- Guidance and education of those who are not able to donate blood due to health conditions such as low hemoglobin

Individual assistance to children and adults with disabilities:

- Beneficiaries were able to get education and obtain degrees, received medical assessments and treatment, and get jobs through the work of the FS field worker
- The school children who volunteer as writers for exams for visually disabled / impaired students got exposed to the special needs sector of society, this motivated several to help even more, and to join FS when they grow up

School children: (PFL - Program for Future Leaders)

Instilled in school children values of teamwork, leadership qualities, and responsibility towards society, while having fun.

Reading Room and Library for local residents:

Local area residents got a safe and quiet place to read newspapers and magazines, and opportunity for young and old alike to borrow books from the library on large variety of subjects and in different languages

Student Volunteers: (Participation in governance at FS and planning; PUY - Program for University Youth; self-development)

- Opportunities to experiment, learn from mistakes, and develop skills helpful throughout their lives. Volunteering at FS is life altering and career enhancing experience. The FS motto is "Self-development Through Service;" volunteers have often said, "I have gained far more from Friends Society than what I had given"
- Opportunities to spend their spare time in constructive activities, develop a sense of social responsibility, better understand the situation of those who are less fortunate
- Opportunities for them to socialize and make new friends and have fun

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES – DETAILS & PHOTOS

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

CHEER UP

The first activity of FS, and continued for 50 years, involves visits by volunteers to institutionalized children with various disabilities (physical, mental or visual) to spend quality time with them providing positive environment in which they realize happiness and develop self-confidence. Children are 10 to 15 years old. Typically, 6 to 12 volunteers visit them every week on Saturday evenings. This is an increase from visits every two weeks in the past. Each visit is around two hours.

Typical activities include:

Entertainment / fun activities: antakshri, storytelling, singing songs, dance, garba, clay work, passing the parcel, tactile painting, Zumba, and so on.

Awareness / educational session: team building games, interactive sessions on language barrier, education and career opportunities, chess competition, identifying objects, public speaking,

Sports: kabaddi matches, musical chair, three-legged races, cricket, 'dabba fod,' football, basketball, and bowling. When proper setting or equipment are missing (such as for bowling or basketball), volunteers improvise, and all still have fun

Occasional events: Navratri, Uttaran, Rakshabandhan, Janmashtami, Diwali, Christmas, preparation and participation in FS' annual event SHAURYA, picnic, and so on.

During the year: 24 two-hour visits were made for cheer up activity at HMDC, Karelibaug with average attendance of 28. The institution visited is "HMDC" (Home for Mentally Disabled Children) in Karelibaug.



DENTAL CAMP AT THE Home for Mentally Disabled Children (HDMC) – the location of conducting Cheer-Up activity.



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School is conducted every Sunday, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM, at the FS campus since 1983. Objectives are to facilitate supplementary education, medical rehabilitation, mobility improvement, and social integration of non-institutionalized children with disabilities who live across Vadodara. They are in the age range of 10 to 25 years. A charitable organization provides free lunch for them. Children are

brought to the campus and returned home by auto rickshaws hired by FS. Attendance at each event is around 25 to 30.

Typical activities include:

Entertainment / fun activities: music, singing songs, dance, paper folding; colouring; clay modelling; mono acting; artwork, games, etc. and games such as musical chair, antakshri, passing the parcel, etc.; storytelling.

Awareness / educational session: team building games, public speaking, help with subjects such as math, reading, writing, etc.

Sports: cricket, musical chair, 'dabba fod,' football, running ball throw, fast walking, etc.

Rehabilitation focused activities: physiotherapy by interns from College of Physiotherapy (Sumandeep), music and art therapy by FS staff, and other special developmental activities by FS' special education teacher.

Occasional events: Navratri, Uttaran, Rakshabandhan, Janmashtami, Diwali, Christmas, preparation and participation in FS' annual event SHAURYA, picnic, and so on.

During the year: conducted this activity on 31 Sundays – this activity was stopped from 21st March 2020 due to pandemic situation.



SUNDAY CLUB

Sunday Club meets every 6 weeks or so at the FS Campus (Petit library) on Sunday afternoons for 2 to 3 hours. Members are adults with some form of disability, most have physical limitations and majority are past beneficiaries of FS as children.

Networking / information sharing: Share information on government policy for 'divyang' (persons with disabilities), new medical treatments, equipment for better mobility, or other assistance, and so on.

Jobs: FS also helps several members find jobs or get special training and equipment (such as sewing machines) that will help them get jobs.

Entertainment - songs on karaoke track, antaksari, games, picnics, etc.

During this year, four meetings were held attended by an average of 23 people. Topics included speakers from outside, distribution of guidelines for applying for MAA card (State Government medical scheme for lower income families of state) and recognition of members who had won awards of best employee in orthopaedic category from Ministry of Labour, Gujarat.



SHAURYA (“A Feat of Courage”)

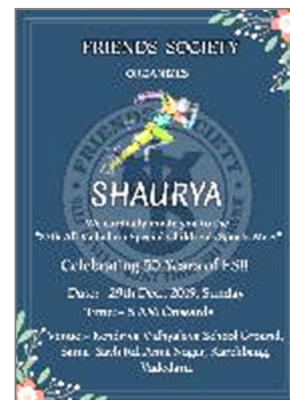
This is an annual event where children with disabilities (physical, visual, or hearing disabilities or those who face mental limitations) from various schools in Vadodara are brought together for a day of sports events and having fun. Children for whom FS provides Cheer Up and other services also participated. This activity was started in 1992 and is held every year since then.

FS volunteers visit around 25 schools and arrange for children with disabilities to participate. More than 700 children register. From that, around 350 (50% to 60%) typically participate. Their ages range from 10 to 20 years. This year the participation from children went up to 426

Around 125 to 150 volunteers prepare for a few months for this large event and to raise funds, then they coordinate all activities during the day, and even clean-up the grounds at the end.

Sports competitions include Dabba Fod, 50M Race, Shotput, Ball Throw, 100M Race, Sack Race, Goal the Ball, Lemon & Spoon, Identify the Object, Archery, Foot Ball Race, Carrom, Langdi Race, Football, Tricycle Race.

This year 435 children with disabilities participated in this mega event. More than 150 volunteers were engaged to ensure proper organization of the event at Kendriya Vidyalaya ground.





Volunteers prepared and displayed all decorations



ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE LEADERS (PFL)

This programme is intended to enable high school students develop into socially responsible, effective, and efficient leaders of tomorrow.

During the year, awareness session on "No Smoking" was organized with the help of seven placement students from Faculty of Law at Classes in Fatehgunj area. 75 students attended the sessions. Also, a cognitive skills workshop was organized for fifteen children from Kamatipura.



PROGRAMME FOR UNIVERSITY YOUTH (PUY)

This program is intended to increase knowledge and awareness of young volunteers on variety of topics of interest to them. Volunteers come up with the ideas for different topics, and coordinate speakers and manage communications. This program was started in 1970.

During the year, three sessions were held, each attended by an average of 25 students. Topics for talks included: "Understanding Public Policies," "Helping elderly population" and "Mental Health during Pandemic time."





ACTIVITIES FOR PATIENTS

BLOOD DONATION

This program is aimed at collecting blood that can be used for the low-income patients at the Sayajirao General Hospital (SSG) and also aims to increase awareness about the value of donating blood, providing guidance to those who cannot donate blood due to some reason (such as low hemoglobin), and to help dispel myths about blood donation that people may have. This program was started in 1969, the year the FS was established.

During the year: nine blood donation camps were organized - 3 at various MSU faculties, 2 in students' hostels, and 4 in industries.

Total **435 units** of blood were collected. A few days before each camp, volunteers would canvass the people at the location of the camp, hold talks with them to educate, and encourage them to attend.

During a camp, lasting from 3 to 6 hours, volunteers coordinate with blood bank staff and the organization that is hosting the camp, organize the room, register people, and provide guidance to those who could not donate blood.



ACTIVITIES FOR FATEHGANJ COMMUNITY

BALWADI (“Ankur Balwadi”)

Balwadi was started in 1982 to provide opportunities to low-income families to get their pre-school children on the right path from early age. The children are 3 to 5 years old. The program was designed with the help of early childhood education specialists from the M.S. University. It has developed a reputation of being one of the best Balwadi in the community.

During the year, Balwadi operated five days a week for 3 hours each day for about 35 weeks. Typical enrollment was 45 children. Two teachers and a helper run it. Children get lunch every day before leaving. Apart from 35 weeks running of Balwadi at FS premises the Balwadi staff also provided online support / education to students during the lock down period.



YOUTH CLUB

Youth Club is held six days a week for two-hours at the FS campus (Petit library). It provides friendly atmosphere for pre-delinquent children from surrounding low-income communities. The atmosphere is conducive to learning and fostering discipline and self-control and reducing delinquent behaviours. The beneficiaries are children in the age range of 7 to 15 years.

During the year, more than 186 sessions were conducted; each session was attended by an average of 18 children and 4 to 5 volunteers.

Typical activities include:

Entertainment / fun activities: antakshri, storytelling, singing songs, dance, garba, clay work, passing the parcel, tactile painting, Zumba.

Awareness / educational sessions: team building games, interactive sessions on language barrier, education and career opportunities, chess competition, identifying objects, public speaking,

Sports: kabbadi matches, musical chair, three-legged races, cricket, ‘dabba fod,’ football, basketball, and bowling. When proper setting or equipment are missing (such as for bowling or basketball), volunteers improvise and still all have fun

Occasional events: Navratri, Uttaran, Rakshabandhan, Janmashtami, Diwali, Christmas, preparation and participation in FS’ annual event SHAURYA, picnic, and so on.



PUBLIC READING ROOM AND LIBRARY

For almost 50 years, FS has been operating the reading room and library for the local area residents.

They come to read newspapers and magazines six days a week, 3 hours every morning.

The library has 6,000 books in three languages and on large variety of subjects. It is open for two hours, three days a week and many of the 70 library members visit to exchange books.

One part-time staff member and 2 to 3 volunteers help with library transactions as well as with cataloging, organizing, and maintaining books.



Volunteers salvaging and inventorying books after a flood

SEWING AND EMBROIDERY CLASSES

VOCATIONAL TRAINING CLASSES

These classes are designed to provide skills to women from lower socio-economic communities – the skills and certificates which can help them increase their earning potential to supplement family incomes. In addition, various activities are aimed at their educational and social development. The beneficiaries are 16 to 45 years old. Classes are held two hours a day for five days. Sewing and embroidery classes are yearlong and vocational training classes (mehndi and beauty parlour) are one-month long. Typically, each sewing class includes around 20 students and vocational training classes have around 5 to 6 students.

Additional activities include educational sessions on various topics important to women and trips and picnics. Students also participate in entertainment programs when major celebrations are held at FS – such as Republic Day event.



SAHIYARI MELA (Collaborative Fair / Arts & Crafts Exhibition)

This event is held once a year at the FS campus. It typically lasts two days and showcases items made by beneficiaries of Sewing & Embroidery classes. Items are displayed and offered for sale. Typically, they include ankodi work, chaniya choli with fabric painting or embroidery, ladies' dresses, clothes for children, shoulder bag, mobile phone cover, decorative pieces for hanging, bookmarks, paintings, jewelry, and so on. Public's interest in the items they had made provides these students encouragement and self-confidence.

The Mela is organized mostly by the FS teachers and students. FS volunteers help in variety of activities such as decorations, placing posters, packaging items for sale and placing price tags on them. They also help by attending at the display tables and facilitating sale of items.



ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS

Individualized assistance, help that is not a part of group activities, was provided to more than 177 adults and children with various disabilities. Key assistance activities:

- ✓ One full time field worker (Chirag Choksi - photo) visits homes, hospitals and clinics, schools, other NGOs, etc. (almost 180 visits in a year). He coordinates for individual medical assessment and treatment and related financial assistance, school admission, tuition assistance, and so on. Around 50 individuals – both children and adults – with different types of disabilities are helped by him.

- ✓ Few members (mostly Ami Patel and Meena Patel) have found writers for writing exam papers for around 70 college students and others with visual disabilities and those who take competitive exams for the possibility of getting jobs. This year, all exams are around 3½ hours long, so the writers spend significant amount of time providing this help. Ami and some of her friends have been doing this activity for almost 30 years.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

CELEBRATIONS

Several occasions were celebrated at FS by different groups: Christmas, Diwali, Eid, Independence Day, Janmashtami, Navratri (Garba), Rakshabandhan, Republic Day, Uttran (kite flying), etc.

SUMMER CAMPS (2) Summer camp is held every year in the first week of May for 15 days, 3 hours / day and five days/ week. It is for school children in Vadodara to keep them occupied with music, dance, drama, pottery, art, etc. Summer camps are very popular with kids, and with parents also who get a respite.



More than 50 children attended the camp. We charge nominal fee which covers the cost of stationery, paint etc. Camps include a cultural show for the parents on the 14th day and a picnic is held on the last day.

Before the camp, volunteers visit homes in the local community to inform parents of the camp and recruit children to attend. Volunteers learn how to manage children and conduct activities on a shoestring budget.

A second summer camp was organized this year in Karelibaug for children from the local community, at the request of GACL – the company that is a sponsor of the HMDC where FS conducts Cheer Up activities. This camp was five days long and attended by 50 children and 14 volunteers. The camp was held at the HMDC facility. Along with children from the community, the residents of HMDC (who are also beneficiaries of the Cheer Up activity) participated.

EC CAMP

As usual, an EC camp was held in Bharuch for two days. There were several educational and orientation sessions as well as fun sessions. It was a good bonding experience for the EC members and few other invited volunteers.



'VASTRA DAN' (clothing donations)

FS volunteers campaigned for one week at the MSU campus and Kamatibaug to encourage people to donate their clothes to provide to the needy. They collected about 4,500 clothing items. These clothes were then distributed by volunteers at the pavements around the Fatehgunj area on 25th and 26th January 2020. About 15 volunteers participated in the activity.



-- END --

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

– Leo Buscaglia

"At the end of the day it's not about what you have or even what you've accomplished... it's about who you've lifted up, who you've made better. It's about what you've given back."

– Denzel Washington