

Report on Orientation Webinar Organised by KSCF & VFSTR On 19-06-2021

This orientation session was conducted by KSCF (Kailash Satyarthi Children Foundation) for the benefit of students of VFSTR (Vignan's Foundation for Science Technology and Research - Deemed to be University) so that they are exposed to the work that is being done by KSCF in protecting the rights of the children and in ending abuse and mistreatment towards them.

Context for this Orientation Session:

VFSTR and KSCF have entered a MoU on 20-01-2021 in order to pursue collaborative work. The mention of this orientation event first came up in one of the early meetings held between the aforementioned parties (on 09-03-2021). In this meeting, while discussing "Initiation of Child Rights' Academic Programmes"... "Prof. D. Vijaya Ramu suggested that open elective courses might be the easiest to start, as students would have the flexibility to choose the electives as per the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS). However, prior to any courses being initiated, Prof. D. Vijaya Ramu requested Ms. Sutapa Sanyal (KSCF) if it was possible to start the implementation of the MoU with an awareness/orientation programme through a webinar, to explain the possibilities offered by the proposed courses that may be initiated, if the students show interest in joining these courses. The next step could then be the designing of the curriculum. Ms. Sutapa Sanyal agreed to the awareness/orientation programme, and requested VFSTR for a convenient date and time to conduct the same." (from the minutes of the meeting on 09-03-2021)

Initially, this orientation session was planned to be held around 17-05-2021. However, due to the second wave of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown announced by the AP Govt., this event was postponed to a later date. Eventually, it was scheduled to happen as a webinar on 19-06-2021 via Zoom. With coordination from Mr. Wiggins Bakka (Coordinator, Civil Service Training) and Dr. N. Srinivasu (HoD, S&H) from VFSTR and Ms. Aparna Ravi from KSCF, the following agenda was agreed upon for the orientation session:

- To generate an appreciation of the great social service and the wide range of activities undertaken by KSCF, in order to sensitise both students and faculty on the nature of social problems in our country like child labour, child trafficking and deprivation of education for children between 6 to 14 years etc.,
- To create awareness among our students regarding the internship opportunities available at KSCF for doing social work
- To motivate our students, particularly Law students and Civil Services aspirants to opt for open elective courses, field activities and other related initiatives.

Orientation Session:

Guided by the agenda set forth, the orientation session was planned to move forward with two prominent speakers from KSCF - Ms. Aparna Ravi and Mohammad Chotu. Ms. Aparna Ravi is currently managing the 100 Million for 100 Million campaign (India Chapter) and Mohammad Chotu is a former child labourer and a youth activist in India, who is currently involved in Campaign Against Child Trafficking.

The orientation session was kicked off with a welcome note rendered by Dr. Dasari Adam (Associate Professor, Training & Placement VFSTR). He provided a brief introduction to KSCF

and its legendary leader, honourable Kailash Satyarthi. This introduction was further elaborated by Ms. Aparna Ravi in her own presentation. Ms. Aparna Ravi showcased a short but inspiring video about the movement, its leader, and his vision for securing our future by saving our children. She chronicled the grassroots nature of this movement by highlighting various marches organised by KSCF since 1993 up to 2017. In 2016, 100 Million - a global campaign was initiated to create a safe space and educated society for vulnerable children. One of the inspiring aspect of this campaign is that it is spearheaded by young people mostly under 30 years of age. She also highlighted that this year (2021) is declared by the UN-ILO as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. As a part of this initiative KSCF has been demanding for a) a fair share of budgets b) fair share of policies and c) fair share of protections for the children who have been most vulnerable during this pandemic situation.

Addressing the VFSTR community, Ms. Aparna Ravi wanted us to bear the torch in creating and strengthening the safety net for the protection of children. She called on both our students as well as our teachers to be part of this 'citizenship in action,' where we call attention to any instances of abuse against children. She further added that we all can support this campaign by channeling our efforts into education, health, capacity building, mass mobilisation, using technology as a tool of engagement, research work, and rehabilitation support. She highly recommended everyone to watch the documentary "The Price of Free" in order to understand the scope of this issue and need for grassroots mobilisation. She then introduced us to the other speaker Mr. Mohammad Chotu, who shared his testimony as a child labourer. Around ten or eleven years ago he was a child labourer. At that time he and his mother were trafficked by the middlemen to Delhi (from Bihar) and were employed in forced labour. Mr. Chotu was made to work about 15-17 hours per day. He was then rescued by the Bachpan Bachao Andolan workers and was sheltered at Jaipur Balashram, where he received his education. He was inspired by the 'Mukti Kaarwah' and the emancipatory work that is being done by the volunteers and wanted to be one among them in fighting for this cause. Now he is, in fact, leading the 'Mukti Kaarwah' with a presence in various states, where they are fighting to end child abuse, child labor, and child marriages. Mr. Chotu provided the listeners with details on how they work closely with the local elders, leaders, village council, Sarapanch, and others who are invaluable in carrying on the task of educating and spreading awareness. During this pandemic and times of lockdown, the outreach has been difficult but the volunteers have been improvising with the situation by staying true to the grassroots aspect of the movement and knocking on the doors for educating people, collaborating with other local social workers, Aanganwadi workers, etc. Mr. Chotu himself has been involved in conducting free educational classes for children who are unable to pursue their studies due to lockdown. Mr. Chotu also added that most of the volunteers involved in the front lines of this movement are youngsters and that it is the responsibility of youngsters at VFSTR too to take up this torch for the betterment of our society. Ms. Aparna Ravi translated, summarised, and added to what Mr. Chotu spoke (in Hindi) and further encouraged VFSTR community to get engaged in the task at hand.

Presentation by Ms. Aparna Ravi and Mr. Chotu was followed by Q&A session, where some of our students from Bihar tried to bring attention to certain cases of child abuse in that state. Ms. Aparna Ravi assured that there are quite a few legal battles currently being fought to address such cases. One of our faculty from Vignan Institute of Law, Mr. Ashish Kumar asked about the legal challenges faced by KSCF while tackling child labor issues. Ms. Aparna Ravi spoke of the challenges in working with the legal system. Even the first act of filing an FIR with police can be complicated since one has to be aware of what legal sections ought to be invoked. There is quite a bit of training that is done by KSCF in order to work with police in these matters, since most police are not aware of these legal sections. Also, there is a need to see if child-friendly police stations and counselling resources are available since these children who have been brought to these police stations are experiencing trauma. There is a need to create a safe space for these children when they are brought into the legal and criminal justice system. Then lies the challenge of repatriating the child with their parent, which is also a very tedious and long legal process. Even after repatriation

of the child with the parent, there is a need to make sure that the child is not trafficked or pulled back into child labor and that they are aware of all the schemes that they can make avail of in order to set oneself on a path to emancipation. This is the right time to encourage the child to pursue education, which can set him/her on a path of awareness and success. Mr. Chotu chimed in as well by listing instances where the volunteers tried to stop child marriages and the first obstacle usually is from the parents who try to deny or hide the issue. Then, of course, filing a complaint and following up with the legal system is a time-consuming task. Another question was asked about the mafia or the kingpins who run these child trafficking rackets and once they are busted whether they get reactivated and pose danger. Ms. Aparna Ravi recommended everyone to watch the documentary “The Price of Free” in which they do shed light on such a criminal nexus amongst many other issues. She said that the survivors of such trafficking usually are the best informants who play a key role in exposing crime. She spoke of a Pannalal who is notorious for running such trafficking out of Bihar and how KSCF have tracked their activity, which lead to his arrest. Another question was asked as to how we can (as a common man) respond to child labour when we see it in real life? Ms. Aparna Ravi alerted everyone to the Child Helpline - 1098, which is for rescuing vulnerable children who are in distress. Or simply call the police and inform them. One can also write to the government portal called Pencil Portal and register a complaint there as well. One can also call Banchpan Bachao Andolan’s help number - 18001027222.

This Q&A session was followed by conclusive remarks and vote of thanks by Dr. Adam Dasari who started by thanking Mr. Chotu for sharing his experiences with our audience and inspiring everyone to take up the charge at hand. He also expressed his hope that this collaboration between KSCF and VFSTR will turnout to be fruitful in the coming days. Thanks was also extended to the KSCF team besides Ms. Aparna Ravi and Mr. Chotu, who attended the webinar and supported this entire endeavour. Thanks was also extended to key people from VFSTR who made this webinar possible - Dean Academics Dr. Vijaya Ramu, Dean Student Affairs Dr. Rukmini, Head of Humanities Dr. Sharada Allamneni, First Year Hod Dr. Srinivasu sir, HoD Training and Placement Mr. Raghava Rao, Civil Service Academy team - Ms. Meenakshi Abirami moderating behind the scenes, other colleagues who are relentlessly working to make projects like these possible, and all the students for being so attentive and engaging. Ms. Aparna Ravi also took turn in acknowledging the faculty that are present for this event and was hoping that this event will lay groundwork for engagement from students in the campaigns and potential internship and volunteering opportunities in the future. This is followed by HoD of Training and Placement - Mr. Raghava Rao congratulating everyone for making this event a success and thanked Ms. Aparna Ravi, Mr. Wiggins Bakka, and Dr. Adam Dasari for their efforts. Finally, Mr. Wiggins Bakka expressed his thanks to the team from KSCF and dignitaries from VFSTR, and participants for being so engaging.