Extract from Vinimag (Vinimay’s Newsletter) Issue No 8 (Jan – Nov 2001)

**WOH SAAT DIN …**

(Vinimay’s Week-long Camps)

Jagan can never forget those wonderful seven days.Everyday there was something new. One day he learnt how to use an electric line tester. Another day it was how to operate a bank account; he even wrote a cheque for one lakh rupees payable to his friend! He learnt how to use a dictionary; found the route from Mumbai to Ajanta on a tourist map; prepared a collage painting; solved puzzles.

And there was the trip to Karla caves, with ice cream and snacks thrown in; the treasure-hunt with clues which were real brain-teasers; the songs he learnt from the Didis: ‘lakdi ki kaathi’, ‘one big buffalo’, and the Meera Bhajan; the daily cultural program, while preparing for which, with gentle guidance from the Didi, he learnt how to work in a group.

The quiz program, not on bookish and unrelated facts but based on what he did and learnt during those seven days; the long walk to the stream; the monkeys at the picnic spot which were more monkey-ish than him.

And, the full-fledged mock election for the post of the chairman, with all its poster making, speech making and actual voting!

The entire camp sitting huddled together, fascinated by the glorious sunset; the first clouds of monsoon descending down all of a sudden and out of nowhere.

Freedom but within reasonable limits under the ever-watchful eyes of the Sir; the continuous prodding for punctuality; small tips on manners; the Didi whispering to him not to make noise while chewing food.

The generous appreciation he got whenever he did something well. The ever-caring Sirs and Didis; the first-aid session at night when wounds and bruises were attended to; he remembers how he felt jealous of Suhas who fell ill and his Sir kept awake throughout the night attending on him.

The last tearful day, where it all ended like a dream and he boarded the bus clutching the ‘chikki’ packet which he would share with his closest friend once he got back home.

Those seven days of the Vinimay camp that he attended, Jagan can never forget.

(Woh Saat Din…contd.)

Many of the activities of Vinimay – such as play centre, coaching classes etc. – demand volunteers’ time frequently and throughout the year. In addition to these extensive programs, there are also intensive programs, such as Out-station Camps, summer vacation program (‘Vinimay Halchal’), Bal Mahotsav (see Vinimag-5) etc.

Out-station camps, as the name implies, are camps organized outside the campus of the child welfare institutions. They are designed to provide the children with a right mix of fun, adventure, learning and training in social living.

**Why Camps?**

Camps provide a holiday for the under-privileged children, giving them a change of atmosphere and a change from the routine life. They provide them exposure to the outside world, new situations and new people.

They give relaxation and entertainment to the children, *which they need and deserve more than any of us.* For the under-privileged children -- haunted by their traumatic past, difficult present and uncertain future -- camps are not just recreational but are also therapeutic.

In addition to the recreational and therapeutic values, camps also can be used to inculcate hygienic habits, good manners and healthy values; discipline and punctuality can be fostered; learning and observation skills can be sharpened. Behavioral problems can be identified and corrected, especially since staff members who know the children well are also present in the camp. Camps also help introvert children to overcome their inhibitions through individual and group activities.

**How are the Vinimay Camps Conducted?**

Vinimay’s camps are conducted in accordance with a well-planned timetable, which was developed after lengthy brainstorming sessions for the first camp in 1991; the timetable gets continuously fine-tuned based on field experience. The program contains a proper mix of physical, academic, creative, recreational and cultural activities. Table-A gives a typical timetable.

The children are divided into small groups of about 10 and each group has a volunteer as group-leader; some of the group leaders are ex-students of child welfare institutions, whom Vinimay has helped to settle down in life and who can be ideal role models for the children. First-time volunteers to the camps join as assistant group-leaders. In addition there is a volunteer as Camp Leader who is overall in-charge of the Camp.

In many activities children work in separate groups, but they are also often brought together for collective activities. While the group-activities enable the volunteers to pay enough individual attention to the children the collective-activities help to maintain the sense of unity of the camp.

**Activities in the Camp**

**Educational Sessions** After the morning prayers, physical exercise and breakfast, the children participate in discussion sessions on different topics, which are conducted by the volunteers. The subjects chosen depend upon the age group of the children as well as the expertise of the volunteers. Some of the subjects covered so far in these camps are:

01. Health and Hygiene 02. Fun with Arithmetic 03. Language Skills

04. Use of Dictionary 05. Our Motherland 06. Bank Transactions

07. Observation Skills 08. Geography & Maps 09. Craftsmen’s Tools

10. Planning an Excursion Tour 11. Planning the Personal Budget

The morning sessions are also used for solving puzzles through worksheets and for artwork (individual as well as group work).

**Indoor-games sessions**

After lunch, children play games like ‘musical chairs’ for a short time to ward off drowsiness. Then there is the session of in-door games which includes mechano-sets, building blocks, chess, Chinese checkers, etc.; the children are encouraged to learn new games. This session is also used for reading books.

**Out-door games sessions**

After tea, the children play out-door games; each child is encouraged to try different games. Some days they go for a walk around the camp-site.

**Cultural programs sessions**

The out-door games session is followed by a short singing-session and dinner. After dinner, each group presents a cultural program; then the children are briefed about the program for the next day and after a prayer, the children go to bed.

**Review of the day**

After the lights-off for the children, the volunteers review the day’s program, and plan the finer details of the next day’s program.

**Special Activities**

1. **Election** - A mock-election is held to elect the Chairman of the Camp; this includes poster making, campaign speeches, ballot papers, voting etc. As part of this game, the children get a briefing about types of government, democracy, the actual election procedure, etc.

2. **Picnic** - One day the children are taken to the near by Karla Caves (Khandala Camps) or the Atomic Power Station (Tarapur Camps).

**Camps organized till now**

Vinimay has so far conducted **SIXTEEN** camps in which **729 children** have participated. Nine of them were in Khandala (hence the name ‘Khandala Camps’), eight of which were organized with financial support from Fresh Air Fund Trust and organizational support from Prem Daan, both Mumbai based organisations; the last Khandala camp was supported by Diocesan Youth Centre, Bandra, Mumbai. The remaining seven camps (the ‘Tarapur Camps’) were organised at TAPS (Tarapur Atomic Power Station) Staff Colony at Boisar (about 100km from Mumbai), with support from TAPS and their staff. Table-B gives details of these camps.

Since the number of children to be covered by this program is large, these Vinimay Camps are once in a lifetime opportunity for the children, who look forward eagerly to be selected for the camp; and, once having been to the camp, they cherish the experience for life. The same is true of Vinimay volunteers too, except that the volunteers get more than one chance to attend these camps!

**And Finally, the cost**

The camps cost Rs.100 per child per day, which includes travel, boarding and lodging, stationery, toiletries etc. Vinimay spends about Rs. 60,000 in a year for two camps accommodating about 90 children. Monetary support from you will enable us to sustain this program which helps to add some days of unbounded joy to the lives of the under-privileged children.