

# **PEDAGOGY, EDUCATION AND ACTIVITIES AT LEBENSILFE**

**By Dr T.Saraswathi Devi (Sarah) M.A; PhD**

**Dr T.Saraswathi Devi M.A; PhD, Founder & Executive Director Lebenshilfe (regd) India, Distinguished Member Scientific Committee (EJID- European Journal of Intellectual Disability) Switzerland, Intensive in-service trainee Lebenshilfe Germany in the field of mental retardation, Member, IASE 9USA)**

## **Introduction**

**Needs, may differ from person to person. It is needless to say that every single individual carries certain needs, which grow with the growing age. Having needs is natural and meeting certain needs is essential for a healthy life promotion. People often get confused in differentiating essential needs from demanding desires. Desires are self-oriented and needs are situation-oriented as far as mentally retarded are concerned. To my experience, most of the desires can be satisfied with financial strength and maximum needs could be met with a sense of understanding over the situation. Meeting some pressing desires leads to personal satisfaction and attending certain essential needs lead to quality life promotion. Needs of people with mental retardation are considered as special needs. They require proper recognition and appropriate attention. Lack of proper medical care and negligence in attending special needs create physical, psychological, social, spiritual abilities deterioration. If they are neglected and felt not required, they damage the functional abilities affecting the healthy life thus leading to functional declension.**

**The subject of aging is drawing greater attention in these days in developing countries too, creating considerable interest in quality life promotion. India leaves no exception from issues related to aging and its associated problems when compared with developed countries. People with mental retardation having age-associated problems are often neglected and devalued. They are given a low status placement in the society. Negligence of families to furnish necessary nourishing care and to create an environment necessary for healthy living necessitated institutions like Lebenshilfe to explore possibilities for suitable solutions to these problems. The ignorance, inability and lack of**

interest of parents over these problems not only lead to confusion creation but also throw the retarded-aging into a miserable condition where they undergo more stress leading to distress and much tension causing frustration.

## Educational Programs in Lebenshilfe

Nursery programs:

Kids learn more skills through play says author Saraswathi Devi(Sarah). Kids fail to use their fingers meaningfully. They do not have body image and as a result fail to name the fingers. Lebenshilfe created an activity to teach kids about the five fingers using a painted earthenware pot for this purpose. This helped to teach the kids finger recognition and counting besides sensorial stimulation.

Toy Play as a therapy

Based on psychological issues, Toy Play Therapy was created to help the kids to get their accumulated feelings released. This therapy is driving the fear complexity away and filling their hearts with greater confidence and love. Children are encouraged either in group or independently to play with the varieties of toys which help to receive a different sensorial message from each toy.

### Drawing & Painting Activity

They learn colors and sizes while drawing and painting using their palms



All the skills in the developmental area are inter related to skills in other developmental areas. The ability to color leads to knowledge of colors, naming the objects and shapes, counting and interacting with other children. The child's performance among the five developmental areas may not be even. Rates of change in one area may vary while skills and behaviors in other developmental areas are being acquired as child develops at his or her own

capacity. Socially and family environment will influence developmental outcomes. The available stimulation matches current skills and readiness to learn the new task is shown. Drawing and Painting Great Tools for Relaxation and Recreation for the ageing and people growing to age.

*SAND PLAY AS A THERAPY:* The thought was caught on the seashore.

The initial inspiration for Sand Play was taken by the author Saraswathi Devi while walking on the seashore in 1981, an year after establishing Lebenshilfe. Her attention was drawn on three kids from Fisherman community, playing in the sand. That gave her a thought to apply the sand play technique at Lebenshilfe for the benefit of mentally handicapped children for sensorial stimulation promotion. It was designed for promotion of brain activation using the sensorial organs. It helps for promotion of concentration, eye-hand coordination, stability, learning colors, counting, body image, unity, friendly relations etc. 'Dudumpulla', a sand-based traditional play between two people (retarded and teacher) will be helpful for increase of memory power, and for better promotion of finger dexterity.

**Tiger Dance** The initial inspiration for Sand Play was taken by the author Saraswathi Devi while walking on the seashore in 1981, an year after establishing Lebenshilfe. Her attention was drawn on three kids from Fisherman community, playing in the sand. That gave her a thought to apply the sand play technique at Lebenshilfe for the benefit of mentally handicapped children for sensorial stimulation promotion. It was designed for promotion of brain activation using the sensorial organs. It helps for promotion of concentration, eye-hand coordination, stability, learning colors, counting, body image, unity, friendly relations etc. 'Dudumpulla' a sand-based traditional play between two people (retarded and teacher) will be helpful for increase of memory power, and for better promotion of finger dexterity **Therapy**

**Tiger Dance Therapy** is a new conceptual and therapeutic innovation developed to drive the mentally retarded with aberrant and other behavior disorders towards overall development. Tiger Dance found to be an effective therapy to help children gain emotional control and as an outlet for accumulated aggression, tension, stress and other such feelings besides physical and mental health promotion leading to overall development. As a

significant therapy activity, it creates relationship between the mentally retarded and the society through tiger dance presentations on various festive occasions promoting social recognition. Through sensorial experiences mentally retarded experience the world around them. As tiger dancers they receive appreciation, acceptance and social recognition from the viewers that encircle them while dancing besides income generation. During this dance their feet and hands(palms) touch the ground (sensorial experience through touch) and ears are tuned to the drum beat(sensorial experience hearing),eyes are pointed to the colorful attire (sensorial experience through eyes) and as a result the minute nerves located in the finger tips ,ear drums, eyes connected to the brain receives enough pressure to activate the brain. This works on nervous system providing massage to fingers.

#### **SNOEZELLEN A DUTCH THERAPY:**

Introduced with the help of International experts of the field.

Snoezelen is introduced by founder Dr T. Saraswathi Devi (author) for the first time in India at Lebenshilfe Visakhapatnam, as a relief to the suffering parents and families having people with severe mental retardation. With the help of Floor Jonker, Jeanny Mannekes who motivated Lolkje Brouwer, Esther Borgmann, Ellis Goede and Irma Rusche experts in this field working at Holland.

What is Snoezelen : It is a Dutch Therapy founded by Mr. Ad Ferheul in the late 1970's in Holland and it is introduced worldwide. It is a multiple sensory activity that is focusing on the five primary senses organized in a sensory world creation. The word Snoezelen is a combination of two Dutch words: 'doezelen', that means to relax, and 'snuffelen' that means to explore, to seek out. Snoezelen is an excellent therapy in a safe, comfortable environment with nice, proper, soft stimulus. The five senses (taste, feeling, smell, hearing and vision) will be discovered and experienced. This therapy is producing excellent results. This therapy plays indeed a vital role in developing the mentally handicapped children experiencing the external atmosphere to enable them to gain considerable knowledge. Through this therapy, all the five sensory organs are well stimulated by using fascinating colors, (stimulating eyes), producing various sounds (ear-stimulation ) touching soft and hard

materials (touch) skin stimulation smelling things for differentiating them (kinesthetic sense). All these things will, not only make the child enjoying but help him/her in grasping things in a proper way. Sensory Stimulation through SNOEZELEN (Dutch Therapy)

*YOGA THERAPY:* Yoga is an ancient science. Nobody knows its origin. Legends say it began with the Gods. Lord Shiva is described as the first great yogi. Many walked the great path of yoga, leaving their own landmarks. Many old Indian stories tell us about these virtuous sages and their wonderful world. These sages were like children and getting fascinated by everything connected with path of Yoga. (Yoga for Children/page 13; 2007).

The Sun-God's Salutations; Surya Namaskaras, the best suited yoga postures for children, who are custodians of each nation, in particular and the whole world at large, I feel yoga is the essential product of the 21st century to lead them to perfect physical health and mental well being (BKS Iyengar.8/Yogafor children 2001]. Lebenshilfe having introduced yoga for the overall development of 410 mentally handicapped people of all kinds from mild to profound aiming at physical as well as mental health promotion.

Benefits: Yoga helps mentally retarded to be alert and attentive. It helps promotion of concentration and paying attention to the yoga therapist while giving instructions. Yoga strengthens the shoulders and legs, ankles, inner thighs, leg muscles and joints what not? It also Improves concentration, body balance, gives relief from constipation and fatigue. Surya Namaskarams help to promote connectivity between mental and physical health.

**COMPUTER EDUCATION: A to Z Language Linguistics**

Children Involved with much interest in computer education training. Lebenshilfe has designed its own computer-assisted training program to promote Academic Skills suitable to Indian culture, customs and traditions which drive them towards Indian way of life-style. A to Z Language Linguistics is a specially designed as computer-based education program which was specially designed to improve the intellectual abilities of children having mild to moderate retardation. This program started producing awesome results like paying attention, improvement in stability, promotion of social skills, perception skills receptive skills, collective-work in unity, etc. and also paying attention Computer Education helps to learn concept of colors, sizes, shapes, fruits, vegetables, transport systems, alphabet, animals, birds, etc

**Other Activities; : Dimsa practice:**

We practice 'DIMSA' dance for social skills and unity promotion as we need them when we approach the society: We learn lessons of unity from our teachers to come out of society's exclusion policy. Dimsa is a tribal dance presented by the tribal folks in crowds inter-locking their hands moving side wards (toward left and right) in a most rhythmic manner. Lebenshilfe introduced this tribal dance to promote unity and a sense of sociability besides promotion of friendly relations. Dimsa is performed in almost all the tribal villages. At Lebenshilfe we organize this tribal dance (folk art) collectively by staff, parents, families, guests as a recreational activity for motivating the kids for participation, for recreation, relaxation and leisure time for the children to growing. Age is no bar for participation.

**Cafeteria: Vocational Skills Promotion:**

A cafeteria is established with an aim where mentally handicapped children are encouraged to prepare coffee & tea and sell the same to the residents of the area around and to visitors and guests.

Puppetry: found to be the best therapy to provide the mentally handicapped children a free expression of thought. The little theatre established at Lebenshilfe for this purpose proved the same. It helped many children to come out of fear complexity and helped them to develop their communicative skills.

**Theatre, Music and Dance as Therapies**

Introduction of theatre, application of music and dance as therapies and instrumental play of music, worked out wonders at Lebenshilfe. All these therapies helped them to form an idea of the kind of abilities they carry and possibilities for their entry into the society. Methods framed and strategies worked out for dance and music proven as the best tools to overcome social skill deficits, behavior disorders and failure to accommodate themselves in socially acceptable situations. They are found helpful to drive people with intellectual disabilities, achieve a place for them in the contemporary society with economic independence with limited or semi skills.

**Methodology:**

1. Group listening of music in closed rooms.

2. Encouraging children to listen to various sounds from animals and other sounds heard from the environment (air, trees, water etc) by taking them out on field trips.
3. Asking them to imitate the sounds they observe in the classroom sessions.
4. Training to observe and slowly to touch the musical instruments.
5. Drawing and painting the musical instruments & the body parts.
6. Observational sessions: Observing the body parts and imitating the body movements.
7. Asking them to imitate the animal movements
8. Movements basing on the space-relationships Discussion: over the impact of the therapies.
  1. Face- to- face interviews.
  2. Open discussion sessions with parents and therapists
  3. Closed Cross-Talks (involving Parents and grand-parents).
  4. Cultural Presentations, honoring the traditions and customs

Right thoughts can show the parents a right path leading to a sense of total relaxation. Moral courage filled in their minds drives them to understand the situation. It builds confidence in them and helps them to choose right activities which wash out the anxiety, stress, and disappointment. Parents agree that they should observe the psychological insights, strengths and weaknesses, inconsistencies etc while making expectations. They should allow their retarded children to grow at their own pace not under pressure.

Entry of mentally challenged people into the society is possible by using music and dance as a pathway. It helps mentally challenged people to cross the barriers and achieve social recognition, acceptance and appreciation. Besides providing a sense of joy to the listeners and viewers, these two therapies promote ability to form the concept, inner motivation and readiness to respond to the external stimulation. Leading them into the society with a sense of confidence that 'I CAN DO' and a kind of feeling that 'I AM NO LESSER THAN ANYBODY' music and dance therapies open doors for simple invitational performances which help them feel that they are dignified as respected human beings. The little remuneration offered by audience in appreciation during the performance promotes income generation. Dance and music skills obtained bring acceptance and social recognition fulfilling the ultimate goal of streamlining them into the society. Dance promotes socio-emotional development and ability to get along with the group and increases the ability for visual attention,

perception and memory whereas music leads to acquire skills in the area of hearing attention, perception and memory. Physical growth lays foundation for all the other areas of development. Dance helps to strengthen both large and small muscles and they become stronger and better coordinated through continued practice during the therapy sessions. The main objective of Sound and Rhythm therapy is to take out the children from isolation and engage them in musical setting so as to make them grow, develop and expand their mind with the beauty and charm in music. Music helps to acquire listening skills. Passive music suits people with aggression. Wrong choice leads to disturbance physically and mentally, causing severe behavior disorders. The therapist is to be smart to find out if the applied sound or song is suitable for that particular student. The rhythmic patterns of the drums automatically help to regulate the breathing while concentration on the dance helps relieve anxiety and direct mental energies in a positive direction.. Music and dance facilitate creative expression in people who have no confidence to express themselves. Therapeutic application of dance and music has enormous power to produce awesome outcomes. Both are Sensory -Centered and Sound-based, helping the retarded to receive sensorial experiences. The irregular body movements of the mentally challenged will be translated into meaningful gestures through dance therapy. It involves the body, mind and emotions for activating the sensory receptors and four Paws. It helps for concentration promotion also. Benefits are multifarious. Therapies used by Lebenshilfe to train the mentally handicapped persons are as follows:

#### 1. Speech therapy

One of the most important things for any child to learn is to speak as much as possible. There is no exception in the case of the mentally retarded children too. People who do not speak properly are usually judged to be very stupid, even if they are not. The Lebenshilfe Special School uses various techniques to make the mentally retarded children to speak. Children are encouraged to take up blowing exercises, to produce sounds of animals and vehicles, repeating their names, greeting others, etc., are used. One of the basic skills necessary for speech is imitating (copying). We start with the teacher should reward whatever sounds the child makes, by echoing them. Any sound the child produces, the teacher repeats in the same way. The child may in turn copy the teacher he should be praised and rewarded for doing so, and in this way will learn that imitating is a good thing. If a child cannot imitate sounds, start by teaching him to imitate actions, e.g., hitting a drum, clapping hands. A child may need mouth exercises to enable him to speak more

clearly, e.g. chewing hard foods (meat, apple, sugar cane, carrot), blowing (e.g., puffing out candles, blowing feather), tongue exercises (e.g. licking sugar, jam, or honey from ground his lips, sticking tongue in or out, trying to touch tip of nose with tongue). The child can watch herself in a mirror as she tries to make different sounds or does various mouth exercises. Often a child will be interested in imitating animal or car noises before he is able to say real words. This activity can be done with a group of children, some of whom can already easily make those sounds. The pupils who are still learning will then join in more easily. If the children make gestures with their arms at the same time as imitating the noise, they may be less self-conscious. Children will also learn by joining in a group and singing. When the child is ready to use words he can be taught to name objects, both real objects and pictures. May be a child will speak more readily with other children than with his teacher, so he should be given an opportunity to do so. If a pupil is mispronouncing many words or not speaking much, set aside five or ten minutes daily for speech work where he/she will learn by the teacher's modeling. The teacher should beware of constantly correcting him/her at other times or he/she will become discouraged. Praise him/her often for producing correct speech.

#### Music Therapy

Mentally retarded pupils usually enjoy music as much as other people do. A pupil's enjoyment of music may motivate her to learn other things. Shy or withdrawn children will often join with other pupils in music and singing, and may even perform solo. Pupils can take part in music classes through playing instruments, dancing and singing. The aggressive type of mentally retarded children are controlled by playing mild type of music and the mild type of mentally retarded children are well motivated by using aggressive type of music (pop music). The Lebenshilfe Special School provides music therapy in two ways - Therapy with the mild type of music and therapy with the aggressive type of Music. The School has a Music therapist.

**RAGA (MELODY) THERAPY: Dr T.V. Sairam Musicologist and Raga Therapy Inventor.**

What is a Raga? Raga, as we all know, is the sequence of selected notes (swaras) that lend appropriate melody, mood or emotion in a selective combination. Depending on their nature, a raga could induce or intensify joy or sorrow, violence or peace and it is this quality which forms the basis for

musical application. Thus, a whole range of emotions and their nuances could be captured and communicated within certain rhythms and melodies. Playing, performing and even listening to appropriate ragas can work as a medicine.(Bagchi, 2003) Various ragas have since been recognized to have definite impact on certain ailments. (Sairam, 2004) .Music therapy is well recognized for its prophylactic and therapeutic role in recent times. (Sairam, 2004)

The following 'Joint Declaration of the 1982 International Symposium of Music Therapists' reads thus : "Music Therapy facilitates the creative process of moving towards wholeness in the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual self in areas such as: independence, freedom to change, adaptability, balance and integration. The implementation of Music Therapy involves interactions of the therapist, client and music. These interactions initiate and sustain musical and non-musical change processes which may or may not be observable. As the musical elements of rhythm, melody and harmony are elaborated across time, the therapist and client can develop relationships which optimize the quality of life. They believe that Music Therapy makes a unique contribution to wellness, because man's responsiveness to music is unique. Raga Therapy was initiated by Dr T.V.Sairam at Lebenshilfe in 2005 Therapeutic Traditions of Indian Ragas: Indian ragas, known for their emotional content and sweep, thanks to their oscillating notes (swaras) are increasingly recognized for their pro-active role as a complementary medicine. (Sairam, 2004).

#### **RAGA THERAPY Organizers**

Ragas can facilitate creative expression in people who have no confidence to express themselves. Thus music is an ideal medicine for those who lack communication.

The Overall Aim of Raga Therapy for the Mentally Retarded is to take out the children from isolation and engage them in musical setting so as to make them grow, develop and expand their mind with the beauty and charm in music.

#### ***True story : Dealing with Dementia***

**Finger motivation and brain activation by playing TABLA.**

From our ancient Indian history it is evident that how practice of different sounds produced out of simple man-made ordinary drums turned helpful to activate brain, to bring a sense of balance in the human-emotions, reenergizes

our body to improve short term memory etc. A seventy five year old artist, expert in playing musical instrument 'TABLA' developed memory loss.

He turned into an awful alcoholic in due course of time. His functional abilities started slowly deteriorating causing anxiety and frustration to the family members. Placing keys at one place and searching in another place, leaving shoes, eye-glasses somewhere and searching for them elsewhere, inability to come back even from familiar places, difficulty in using or to understand even the known words, coming home leaving his wife in the shop itself forgetting her presence etc, shocked his family and friends greatly. His entire family was upset about his behavior. They thought he caught dementia and developed worry and tension about his future. It is common to forget things for such people. Though dementia is common among ageing adults, many of them never develop dementia. What he developed could be mild cognitive impairment causing memory loss. However the chances of developing dementia are possible as it is connected with the age and if the intensity of memory loss gets increased, it may lead to dementia.

It was a stunning surprise to me as I know him and his high rhythmic talents for over four decades. I wanted to work with him and to bring back again on to the right track. I made a home visit and spoke to his family expressing my desire to involve him in the motivational and brain-activating services of mentally handicapped by using rhythmic beats of Tabla, his favourite instrument for mutual benefits. I invited him to Lebenshilfe for this purpose. He was looking at me trying to recollect and respond when I greeted him. His wife was totally afraid and refused to send him as he fails to get into city buses since he often gets confused with reading numbers on the same. Offering transport, I could convince her to start the program thrice a week. She reminded me again and again about his nature of misplacing things. I assured her for his safety and comfort. My intension to involve him in Lebenshilfe's work is to provide a sense of relaxation and recreation besides reducing memory loss. To my observation, he has difficulty to use his fingers suitable to the tunes and rhythm on Tabla as he was doing earlier. I was disappointed as I could not motivate him in any manner on that day. I noticed a personality change in him. Standing as a centre of attraction he was making fun and keeping every one engaged with continuous laughter in the yester years, presently he is speaking limited words and turned quiet. He was responding with simple jerks and visible smiles. My endeavors working with the Tabla Maestro produced outstanding results. People develop dementia, undergo

memory loss resulting failure to recognize his own surroundings, his neighbors, friends, and well wishers and finally fail to recognize themselves.

*What is dementia?* Dementia is a progressive, degenerative brain syndrome that affects memory, thinking, behavior and emotion. Dementia knows no social, economic, ethnic or geographical boundaries and affects people throughout the world. As dementia progresses, individuals affected need care with all aspects of daily life.

*What is to be done and how to take care of such people?* The secret of our strength lies in our invaluable Indian traditional family system and extension of enormous family support basing on the rich heritage of Indian culture. We believe in home care rather than institutional care, which stand as a most ideal way, no matter whether ageing undergoing mild cognitive loss or dementia.

My sincere efforts to rehabilitate him produced outstanding results with mutual benefits. He was of immense use to the institution. His forgetfulness did not come on our way. His fingers started getting motivated and brain started getting activated while playing instrument 'Tabla'. He taught Tabla to mentally handicapped. He did his best though slow, to understand and to respond.

Unfortunately he is no more now. I am right, his condition was mild cognitive development resulting memory loss and such situations can be well taken care of, provided we pay proper attention.

### *Lebenshilfe and the world, collaborations and supports*

#### **Sports and Games: Introduction of Special Olympics**

##### **An Unforgettable Moment**

**Introduction of Special Olympics: Inspiration from Eunice Shriver Kennedy**

Sitting in the Main Auditorium of 'ONE CONVENTION CENTER SEATTLE' USA, in the year 2000 together with the global delegates arrived from all over and eagerly waiting for the arrival of the Special Guest EUNICE KENNEDY SHRIVER, I felt a thrilling experience coupled with a Head-to-Toe

Vibration while waiting for her arrival to see her second time here at Seattle. Recollecting her past memories Eunice Shriver Kennedy narrated the circumstances that drove her to think for starting Special Olympics for children with intellectual disabilities by herself. She said that she was greatly upset with the attitude of a group of children, playing in the park at Washington D.C., The two retarded children came with Eunice Shriver were refused to play with them despite her specific request. She made a mention about this incident during her 'TALK' appealing all the attendees (delegates) to realize the the immediate need to use 'Special Olympics' as a tool for motivating the mentally handicapped having intellectual disabilities for their overall development.

"I recollected my memory flipping back the pages to the year May, 1976. I was specially invited to Hyannis, Rhode Island (President John F Kennedy's Birth Place) by Rotary International to deliver a 12-minute 'TALK' during the Rotary international's District Convention as a beneficiary of Rotary Foundation Awardee of Rotary International. That time Eunice Shriver Kennedy, President Kennedy's elder sister and her brother later turned into senator also attended the convention and heard my TALK as special guests sitting among the audience", said the author.

Dr T Saraswathi Devi Founder Lebenshilfe (author) was greatly inspired by Eunice Shriver Kennedy and her introductory words during the IASSID international Conference held at Seattle, Washington."We were together sitting, talking, exchanging ideas, all around Special Olympics. Her message to the visitors coming to her Best Buddies stall (her son Anthony Shriver Kennedy is Chairman for Best Buddies) started influencing the visitors, Suddenly she questioned whether the author is interested to introduce Special Olympics in India and her answer "YES, WHY NOT? to her, resulted organization of Special Olympics inviting 1000 athletes from 17 institutes of Andhra Pradesh which turned into a big 'TALK' of the city in those days. This three day event, sponsored by City Police Visakhapatnam was ,organized with Sri A.K.Khan IPS, Commissioner of Police as Chairman.(2001)

## **International Collaboration and support from over the world**

### **Focusing Lebenshilfe at Global level**

The author is pleased to share with her happiness, saying that Lebenshilfe receives major global support academically and materially from Switzerland. Under the presidentship of Dr Carminati, an association titled "GILDA" (Geniva India Learning Disability Association) was formed in support of Lebenshilfe to focus its activities at global level from various corners. Presently Nadine Kempf.,Psychologist has taken up the responsibility as its President.

As such financial support is being extended every year for facilities creation such as toilets and bathrooms construction, cots and mattress to all the retarded living in the hostel, arranging parking tiles in the premises , doors fixation to all the almirahs in the Hidden Sprouts Building where "BLOSSOM BUDS " a special classroom facility creation was located, which was created by the author and supported by GILDA, Special furniture for primary sections and other classrooms including the conference hall, new uniforms to all the four hundred (400) retarded children, financial help to renovate and reconstruction of recent HUDHUD CYCLONE damages to quote some.

1.Organization of Research Projects: Research projects were undertaken from Switzerland from PEP-R to ABC Validation (Aman et al.1985). Research Titled 'Validation and Application Of Aberrant Behaviour Assessment Checklist In Telugu Language And Studies On Interventions At Lebenshilfe(A Special School For The Mentally Handicapped) under the initiation and leadership of Dr Giuliana Galli Carminati and her team of Psychologists besides the official guide from Andhra University.These two projects are already completed in collaboration with Andhra University Visakhapatnam and Lebenshilfe Association for the mentally handicapped successfully and the proposal for taking up third research project and to organize workshops in collaboration with Lebenshilfe was under consideration under the guidance of Dr Carminati and her team of Psychologists.

2. Organization of International Roundtable on Sexo-pedagogie inviting twelve international delegates of the field from seven countries under the chairmanship of Dr Carminati and with Francoise Vatre as workshop leader at Lebenshilfe India produced awesome outcome.

3. Organized a week-long work shop on Sex-related issues by Dr Carminati with the support of Federico Carminati at Lebenshilfe for families and service providers of Lebenshilfe.

Dr Carminati arranged author's TALKS' at University hospitals of Geneva, Switzerland where translation assistance was provided by present GILDA President Nadine.

4. Received five Medicos from Medical University of Geneva Switzerland for one month on internship project (May 2012). They paid much interest while walking around in the narrow streets, to visit families of mentally retarded children eliciting information, realizing their living style and asking questions concerning the milestones of development from birth till admission into Lebenshilfe and after etc. They were much moved seeing their living conditions and difficulties, etc.

To quote some such visits:

1. Family of G. Yellaji, a fourteen year old boy having severe mental retardation. He is receiving training since over five years. When he was admitted in Lebenshilfe, self-help skills were not known. He was dependent in attending his personal needs such as toilet, eating, dressing grooming etc. He was having typical behavior problems like biting, pushing others, screaming, shouting, wandering, etc. He was placed in pre-preparatory section at this level for improving his basic skills.

2. Family of P. Ammaji, she is an eleven year old girl, coming from poorer sections of the society. Her father is a helper in fishing boat and mother is a fish-seller. She admitted in Lebenshilfe with severe behavior problems such as beating, biting, pinching, running around, wandering, screaming out with no purpose, disturbing other children, paying no attention etc. Her behavior was destructive and she was hyperactive. She was dependent and unable to attend on her daily needs. Requires assistance to attend on her daily needs.

For promotion of self-help skills she was trained in the primary and elementary levels. After getting trained, she identifies letter 'A', active in picture reading recognizing pictures from picture book, indicates her toilet needs, reduced stubbornness and now following instructions. Helping other children and mingles with peer groups. Improvement was seen in the area of self-help skills. Development in expression of personal skills and decrease in

hyperactive behavior was clearly seen. Destructive behavior was reduced to some extent. Attending therapies also helped her enormously.

### **Support being receiving from IASE, USA**

IASE (international Association of Special Education) USA, is extending excellent services by sending Experts of the field to orient, educate and train the parents, professionals together with the retarded children.

This association introduced the idea of Token Shop Organization, Inspirational Games, Teachers Resource Room etc. Supporting the vocational activity arranging material and equipment from GIVEFUND of IASE. Launched Volunteer Service Project at Lebenshilfe in India to receive experiences of sharing and learning from each other by sending retd. professors of Special Education from USA to orient and educate teachers, parents and other service providers etc.

Author's idea of introducing Internship Project is successfully being run by receiving students from USA and Europe.

### **Motivational Music: Playing Flute by Tim Hoffman, Japan**

This activity is being organized as a gift to Lebenshilfe by Tim Hoffman during his visits to India for his musical concerts organization. Being an American, out of his passion for Indian Music he shifted to India and studied Indian classical music from Pune, Maharashtra, went back to Japan where he is working as a lecturer to teach Indian Classical Music. Lebenshilfe is lucky to receive his support from global level.

Yesteryear's Lebenshilfe turned into a huge organization working from local level to global level growing from strength to strength each year.

Other therapies and activities being organized at Lebenshilfe yielding incredible results:

#### **1.Pre-Vocational Training For Vocational Placements:**

##### **Canteen Organization**

To fulfill the main objective of lebenshilfe to train and drive these people into the society with economic strength Lebenshilfe started organizing several prevocational training programs, organizing a canteen since 1991 to quote

some. Children are trained to sell coffee, tea and snacks to the parent's visitors and others as an income generation activity. This program helped to obtain placements for five trained mentally handicapped people of Lebenshilfe at Gateway Hotel (Taj Group of Hotels) located on Beach Road, in the areas of kitchen and Laundry etc. This vocational training activity is bringing respect, recognition, appreciation and applause from not only the hotel management but also from the customers during their stay.

2. Field trips and outings: Helped in loneliness reduction and social-network formation. Programs organized during traffic week celebrations, painting headlights to the vehicles standing in the junctions of the city streets with the help of Visakhapatnam city police stood supreme in developing social consciousness over mental retardation aging and its associated problems.

What Author thinks "Right thoughts can show the parents a right path leading to a sense of total relaxation. Moral courage filled in their minds drives them to understand the situation. It builds confidence in them and helps them to choose right activities which wash out the anxiety, stress, and disappointment. Parents agree that they should observe the psychological insights, strengths and weaknesses, inconsistencies etc while making expectations. They should allow their retarded children to grow at their own pace not under pressure".

What Author believes? "This article mirrors the authors 'MIND's EYE' focusing her inner ambition to serve the retarded hailing from Poorer sections of the society and the hurdles, challenges, difficulties encountering from time to time and how they are dealt with in driving the organization towards the developmental path?"

**What Brigitte Longerich, Senior Journalist, Switzerland**

**says about Lebenshilfe?**

The association receives partial grant-in-aid to meet the running costs from Government of India, New Delhi and the other amenities from public

together for taking care of the handicapped ranging from children to adults donations. As the financial aspect is turning critical day by day, the founder is forced to spend a lot of time looking for new solutions. Over coming

financial hardships founder Sarah is running the institution to the best of the satisfaction of the parents, families and the rest of the society.

Since 1989, the great work realized by Lebenshilfe has been recognized by one and all. Sarah, who is today compared with Mother Teresa, cannot leave people in the misery. Sarah's work is being supported by 120 staff members and 50 parent-volunteers working.

## **Freedom and dignity for everyone**

From the beginning, Sarah's goals have been very clear: mentally handicapped people are not "incapable and non-productive" persons, like many people seem to think. They are differently abled, they can develop other skills and they must have a status in the society. So her first aim was to make sure that they all would get economically independent, by giving them an adapted education that would allow them later to earn money and be free. "Every mentally handicapped person has the right to live a life of quality and dignity", she insists.

The children learn to read, write and count, they get a general instruction, learn about science and religion, drawing and painting no matter they are children, growing to age or ageing and the goal is that everyone can develop his own personality. Carpentry, gardening, sewing, book-binding, cooking, toy making and candle making can be learnt and enable the children to find a job later on. The residents also make sports and Special Olympics are organized regularly. Families are asked to participate in all these activities and in the daily life at Lebenshilfe, in order to increase their knowledge about taking care of their handicapped children.

Lebenshilfe is also organizing seminars, workshops and symposiums, together with specialists of other countries.

### **New therapeutic approaches**

Lebenshilfe is really using modern therapeutic approaches for the children, and in Europe people are wondering how all this can be achieved in a country like India. It is mostly due to Sarah's energy, intelligence and engagement, but also to her generosity and confidence. She is restlessly looking for the best solutions for her residents, travels regularly to Europe where she makes new

contacts, invites specialists from other countries and introduces new therapies like the Tiger dance therapy that she invented herself. According to their personal needs, the handicapped people will get physiotherapy, speech therapy, music therapy, yoga and dance therapy, sports and games and even snoezelen therapy.

Artistic activities are also very important: singing, dancing, painting, playing theatre are everyday activities and festivities are very frequent. "Life is rich", says Sarah. "Mentally handicapped people should be able to live this richness like we do. My visitors all ask me how it is possible to achieve all this in a third-world country. My belief is that you can get the same results under a tree as in a high-tech building. It's only a question of humanity".

#### Sensitization on a large scale

We had the chance to meet Sarah during her European trip last summer. A few hours spent with this very special woman are unforgettable: she speaks about her experience - in fact the project of her whole life - with such a charisma that you just would go to India and see by yourself! Although, the day we met, Sarah's eyes became sad for a short while. She just had been informed that the Indian government was going to reduce its financial contribution to Lebenshilfe, unless the collaborators were trained as educationists. Which is impossible, due to financial reasons of course. "When I was informed about that, I stayed in my room for three days and three nights. I looked into myself and I asked God to show me the way. He never deserted me, and I know that there will be a solution". Then she organized a reunion with her collaborators. All of them, educationists, teachers, cleaning and kitchen personnel, bénévoles, told her: "we are going to stay with you". And they accepted to have their salaries reduced during the next three years. In between, Sarah, restless, went on the road again: in Europe she has multiplied contacts, proposing different kinds of partnerships and inviting everyone to come and visit her.

"I want to serve", that's what Sarah decided when she was six years old. To accept, to integrate mentally handicapped people and to offer them a life of quality is her personal way of serving.

**"But", concludes Sarah, "in the matter of handicapped people, families, communities and governments also have their part of responsibility. It's only together that we will give these children a better life".**

*Lebenshilfe developed from scratch to its today's heights due to several helping hands. starting from local government to central government, besides he help being extended by International experts and associations .Lebenshilfe acknowledges all those who are strengthening its serving hands profoundly.*