

## **RAJNI NIJHAWAN CHARITABLE TRUST**

### **Visit to Prerana Education Centre, Siliguri**

**Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2017 at 11.00 am**

Mr. J.C. Nijhawan, Managing Trustee, Mr. Rajiv K. Puri, Trustee – together with his family, Mrs. Malini Puri and Miss Kanika Puri, and, Mr. I.K. Howard, Trustee and Mrs. Marianne Howard, visited the Prerana Education Centre (PEC) which is operating under the auspices of the North Bengal Council for the Disabled (NBCD) and run under the able leadership of Mrs. Rita Sengupta, Director PEC. This Centre caters to children who are deaf, blind; suffer from cerebral palsy, autism and multiple disabilities.

The Trustees and their families were greeted at the entrance to the Centre by the Mrs. Sengupta, Staff Members and a cross-section of handicapped children, who, after signing a song of greeting in Bengali, offered the Trustees the traditional welcome shawls. Mrs. Sengupta introduced the Trustees and their families to the children and Staff present.

This was followed by a discussion and presentation by Mr. Utpal Banerjee and his wife on Floriculture, and, the possibility of growing Orchids on the Educational Centres premises so as to gainfully employ some of the parents of the children as well as to provide the Centre with a sustainable form of income from the sale of the flowers. Mr. Banerjee and his Team would provide all the technical support and teach the selected workers how to grow the flowers and tend to them till they were ready for harvesting. The flowers, once they reached perfection, would be cut and sold back to Mr. Banerjee at a fair price thus taking care of the marketing requirements. The presentation lasted for about 30 minutes and was well received by the Trustees.

Mr. Howard was requested to contact Mr. Banerjee and to collect all the relevant details about this Project so that a presentation could be made to the Board of Trustees for getting the Trust involved once Mr. Nijhawan and Mr. Puri returned to Kolkata around 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

Thereafter, Mrs. Sengupta and her Staff took the Trustees and family members on a tour of the Educational Centre and introduced them to the Staff, Parents and Children who were being trained for various disabilities in the Centre.

The Trustees were encouraged to inter-act with the students and staff and were encouraged to ask them questions on their studies, progress in rehabilitation, if they were happy in the school and enjoyed the way they were being taught. The responses received were most encouraging and educative and it was clear that the children felt “at home” in the environment of the School. The Trustees were exposed to children suffering from cerebral palsy, autism, blindness, deafness and multiple disabilities and were shown how each type of disability was treated so as to make the child respond and become a productive member of the class.

It was, indeed, for the Trustees, a most satisfying and humbling experience and they were full of praise for the Staff who had the passion, patience, courage and determination to carry on this good work.

The Trustees were unanimous in their praise and it was very evident that it took a very special type of person who had the passion, patience, courage and determination to deal with these children and give of their time, energy and of themselves every day to ensure that the children got the best education possible. This attitude expressed by the Staff and Teachers of giving selflessly to those less fortunate is best summed up in the words of Khalil Gibran:-

*“Who are you that men should rend their bosom and unveil their pride, that you may see their worth naked and their pride unabashed?*

*See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving.”*

— **Kahlil Gibran, Xian zhi**

Before the end of the tour, Mrs. Sengupta took the Trustees to the Handicraft Centre run by the School where different products such as bags, ear-rings, table mats and napkins sets, Paper- Mache items, embroidered items and woven items were on display and sale. Mrs. Puri, Miss Kanika Puri and Mrs. Howard purchased a few items which they found to their liking.

A group of parents that had, with the assistance from Prerana, started a masala grinding operation next showcased the samples of the various spices produced by them to the Trustees and explained the manufacturing and sales operations. This was greatly appreciated by all concerned as the women were gainfully employed, and, slowly had become self-reliant and were now able to contribute to their family's welfare and to the society in which they lived.

As the Trust had donated some computers and Daisy Recorders to Prerana for use by the children, a small ceremony was organised in which Mr. Nijhawan and Mr. Puri formally handed over the items to the children of the Centre. These gifts were greatly appreciated by the students and staff of Prerana.

The tour concluded with a vote of Thanks to the Trustees of the Rajni Nijhawan Charitable Trust by Mrs. Sengupta and a traditional farewell song by all the children present. This was a very emotional send-off and it left a lump in the throats of many when the children requested the Trustees to come again to visit them soon.