

A Brief about Tiljala SHED



Tiljala SHED is a grassroots non-profit organisation working for the last 37 years in some of central Kolkata's most deprived urban communities. Founded by a group of young people from the Tiljala ragpicker community, Tiljala SHED aims to empower these communities to lift themselves out of destitution, illiteracy and marginalisation. We work in four communities comprising around 2500 families. Most live in illegal shelters beside the railway tracks or canals and some in the surrounding slums. Typically, the men are either unemployed (through illness or addiction mostly caused by the physical effects of hard labour), labourers or engaged in the informal economy (cycle rickshaw riders, vegetable sellers, working in small shoe factories or similar). The women are rag pickers, maidservants or homemakers. Our livelihood programs over the years have helped many women become entrepreneurs, setting up small businesses within the community. Most adults are functionally illiterate. As a last resort many women find themselves trimming slippers at an exploitative rate of pay.



Trimming slippers

Programs:

Educational support: 600 children attend daily after school classes in our centres in the heart of each community. Our teachers provide remedial support, help with homework as well as running additional programs: to enhance the joy of learning; to understand the world and their environment; to understand their rights; to enjoy sports and creative activities. Over the last 8 years we have run these classes right up to class XII and some youngsters are now studying at university. There is now a literate cohort of young people in each community. Although these classes include both boys and girls, we have specific



programs for girls and a library for their exclusive use, with computers and support staff. Taekwondo classes are particularly popular with the girls providing discipline, an outlet for energy and a sense of physical empowerment. Some children have competed and succeeded at state level.



After school Class in Tangra Centre



Taekwondo in Topsisia Centre

SHE Advocacy: Tiljala SHED works with female heads of households to ensure that the whole population has access to all rights and entitlements under West Bengal and Government of India welfare schemes. We facilitate the creation of Self-Help Groups¹. The SHG enables them to save, to lend and to borrow money either to set up businesses or for personal expenses. They are also able to take business loans from banks under the SHG scheme. But it also empowers these groups to act within and beyond the community. They are able to approach officials, report community issues e.g. child marriage, domestic abuse, broken infrastructure like streetlights. Our SHGs were active in the pandemic, helping out by providing rations to needy families. These women, though illiterate themselves, are loud advocates for education and child protection. Our small team of 3 conducts training sessions in business skills, assists with the documentation required for setting up the SHG and brings in officials to assist with bank account opening and applications for welfare benefits.

Whilst Tiljala SHED openly advocates for women and children, we also believe in the importance of responsible men and boys and work with them through sport and education to encourage mutual respect, respect for women and girls and ambition to reach for a better life.

Emergency Food and Medicine. We are able to provide temporary relief to families in crisis with food rations and medical support. This program expanded during the pandemic thanks to support from corporate and institutional donors. 16,000 ration packs were distributed over 2020 and 2021.

¹ (SHGs) an India-wide scheme under which women from small neighbourhood groups share a savings account into which each woman contributes regularly.



Larger Objective

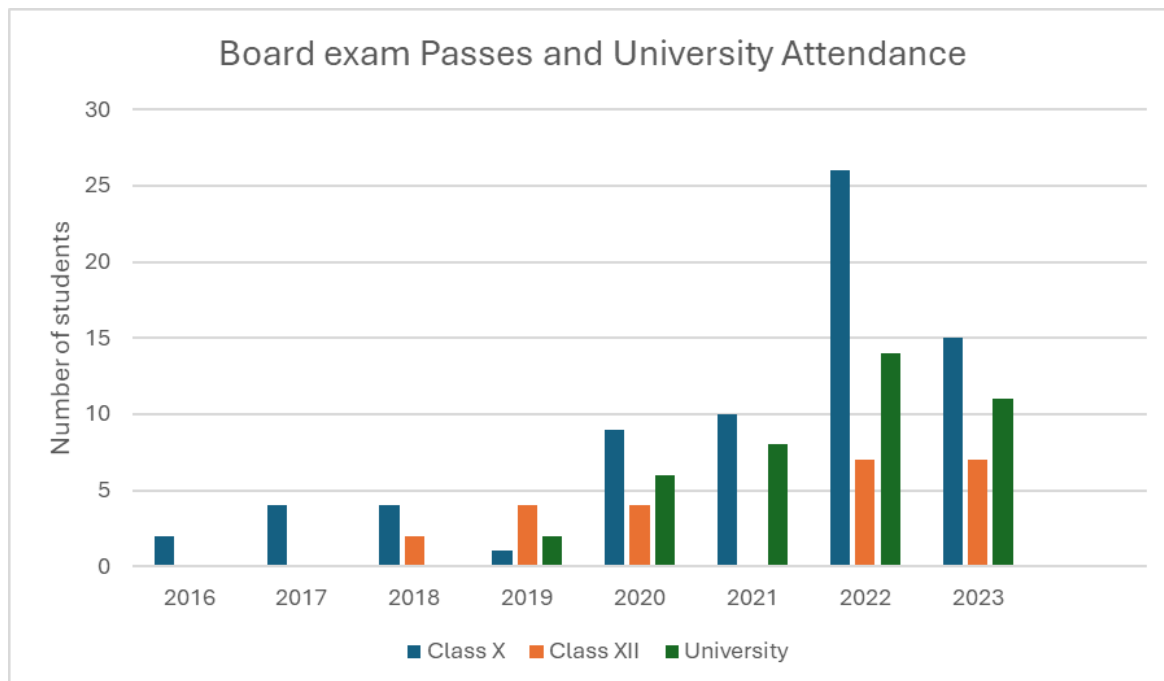
- Every family in these marginalised communities will be empowered to seek education for all children up to class X and XII and beyond.
- Every family in each community will be able to access all their welfare entitlements
- Every child will be safe and protected from child marriage, child labour and abuse
- More girls each year to break out of the cycle of early marriage instead of work
- Take on more space to accommodate all the need for after school classes – a further 600 children or more
- To help create a further 60 SHGs across all the communities over the next 5 years.

Profile of Beneficiaries

- All beneficiaries live below the poverty line
- The adults are mostly functionally illiterate
- Most live in illegal makeshift structures beside the railways and canals
- Some live in single rooms in the slum
- Occupations are in the informal economy: rag pickers, beggars, rickshaw drivers, maidservants, vegetable and fruit sellers, street vendors and unemployed.
- Among the men there is high unemployment. Alcoholism, mental health problems, physical breakdown, and drug abuse are all present.
- For the women, desertion by husbands is common. They support their families through rag picking, domestic service, chappal trimming – all extremely low paid.
- Domestic violence and eve-teasing are endemic.
- Marginalisation, illiteracy and poverty means that the bureaucracy works against these people. Although they have rights they cannot always assert them.
- All belong to minority groups, either Muslim or low caste Hindu

Results

Education



Since we started the extended after school classes for secondary school children, there has been a marked increase in Class X passes and they are now going on to Class XII and some into university. We are encouraging youngsters to take up vocational training and work placements after class X or XII rather than university as we believe earning becomes a priority in these deprived neighbourhoods. Very able children will still be supported through higher education. Note that the pandemic has skewed the results in 2021 and 2022. For the first time there is a small literate cohort in each community.

Empowering Rag Pickers Tiljala SHED founded, supported and guided the ARP (Association of Ragpickers) to lobby the government to recognise rag picking as an occupation so that rag pickers can benefit from the BMSSY² scheme.

Self Help Groups and Livelihood Successes With access to financial services either through their own SHG funds or through banks, many of our women have moved from rag picking into setting up small businesses of their own. They sell bangles or household products door-to-door, set up small shops or tea stalls in the community. They sell sarees and other clothing. Some can afford to send their children to private schools or move out of the squatters altogether and into legal housing.

Through our facilitation and support of SHGs, the women now understand their entitlements and are beginning now to initiate applications for government schemes.

² BMSSY Bina Muliya Samadjik Suraksha Yojana Scheme– an insurance scheme for unorganised workers.

They feel empowered to approach the authorities to report problems in their communities and challenge those who aim to exploit them.



SHG Members Arbina (left) and Nagma (right) Arbina discovered that her child was entitled to a government scholarship. She approached the school and the headmaster arranged for all eligible children to receive the scholarship. Nagma, who continued with her education after marriage, learned about Kanayashree³ and shared this in the community. She is now an active volunteer providing vital support to our team.



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Donate: <https://www.globalgiving.org/donate/30854/tiljala-society-for-human-and-educational-development/>

³ Kanayashree: scholarships and grants for girls between 13 and 18 years who remain in education or vocational training. One off grants for girls 18-19 who complete education.