

Velpur continues to be child labour-free



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India's model village Children engaged in any kind of work in Velpur mandal of Nizamabad district are brought back to school. | Photo Credit: Mohd Arif

Social evil could be eradicated with entire community's involvement: Ashok Kumar

Velpur which hogged the limelight for being the first child labour-free mandal in the State on October 2, 2001 continues to maintain the status even after one-and-a-half decades, all thanks to the relentless and sustained efforts put in by the then Collector G. Ashok Kumar.

The tempo in carrying out the campaign against child labour and enthusiasm among the officials, people and parents ensured that children are going to schools even today. The teams are ever vigilant and report back to authorities concerned if they find any child, most likely belonging to migrant families, is out of schools in the mandal.

"We could sustain the tempo since 2001 and the mandal is 100% child labour-free. Recently a boy who is said to be an orphan and was traced to a hotel, was put back to school as soon as the news came to the light," says Neeradi Bhagya, village Sarpanch at present and the then MMP president. Narrating the efforts of teams which worked day and night to eliminate the stigma of child labour Mr. Ashok Kumar, who is now the state Principal Secretary BC Welfare said that they scoured work spots such as hotels, tea stalls, cycle shops, car service stations, beedi factories, fields, forest areas, brick kilns to check if children were engaged in any form of labour and prevent it.

Teachers, in fact, were reluctant entrants. The mandal teachers initially thought that it was a project of DPEP and that they were not concerned. But, with the direct involvement of District Collector and MEO they were forced to join in, he said.

"I held meetings with the teachers' unions and sought their support. I also held meetings with headmasters and teachers. It was impressed upon them very clearly that the drive was directly related to education and that they should be personally responsible for retention of children.

They were told to take special care of children coming from bridge schools and those who had the fear of schools. They were asked not to beat or use very harsh words".

Finally, on October 2, 2001 Velpur was declared a child labour-free mandal. All the 8,057 children in the mandal were in the schools.

This includes nearly 800 children who were brought back to school. The biggest success of the programme is that there is 100% retention and there are no child labourers in the mandal now.

It underlines the fact that only when the community gets involved can major social evils like child labour etc., be tackled with effectively.

The film 'Maa Orlo Balakarmikalu Ieru' based on this drive in Velpur, won the Golden Nandi award for the Best TV documentary in Andhra Pradesh for the year 2002.