

Report on Field Visit to Shishu Sarothi, organised by the Centre for Disability Studies & Health Laws (CDSHL).

The Centre for Disability Studies & Health Laws (CDSHL) is a vital institution at the National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam. It focuses on research, education, and advocacy in disability studies and health laws. The Centre conducts interdisciplinary research, organises educational initiatives, and engages in advocacy to promote inclusive policies and improve the lives of persons with disabilities. It collaborates with various stakeholders to foster awareness, disseminate knowledge, and drive positive change in the field.

On 24th May 2023, the Centre for Disability Studies and Health Laws organised a visit to Shishu Sarothi, a registered organisation working for and with children and persons with disabilities in Assam and NorthEast India. Dr. Tanwi Shams, Research Associate at CDSHL and the Centre's Coordinator, and student volunteers represented the university during this visit. Shishu Sarothi's work encompasses two key aspects, namely service delivery and rights realisation, with a focus on core services in health and education.

Our visit commenced at 12:00 PM with an introduction and comprehensive overview of the organisation's activities by Mrs. Kavita Patwary, Joint Treasurer followed by a tour of every part of the NGO. Our first stop was the Therapy Unit, which focuses on children aged 0-6. The primary objective of this unit is to provide outdoor services for the early detection, screening, and management of high-risk babies, infants, and young children who experience delayed development and disabilities. The children, who are frequently referred by the medical fraternity, undergo assessments to identify delays in various developmental aspects such as physical (gross and fine motor skills), language and communication, cognitive abilities, self-help skills, and social skills. Play way methods are employed to ensure the active participation and engagement of the children. Therapies and appropriate interventions are demonstrated, while home management programs are explained to parents and followed up on a regular basis.

Afterward, the visit led the volunteers to the Reverse Inclusive Playgroup, which caters to children in the 3-6 years age group, encompassing both children with and without disabilities.

Here, the children are taught preschool skills and concepts, and this program has been extended to include lower and upper kindergarten sections as well. Additionally, there are programs in place to sensitise mainstream schools to create an inclusive environment. Following that, the Leisure Learning Unit, designed specifically for children between 9-18 years of age with high support needs were introduced to the volunteers. The primary focus of this unit is to increase the child's awareness and responsiveness to their environment and stimuli, facilitating their meaningful engagement in leisure time activities. In conjunction with positioning, posture, and therapies, the ultimate objective is to enhance the overall quality of life for both the students and their caregivers.

Thereafter, the Information and Communication Technology Laboratory (ICT Lab), which has the objective of providing comprehensive computer-aided training programs to all the children, was introduced. The aim is to develop their proficiency in basic applications and build their ICT skills. The lab also offers adaptive facilities with special software tailored to meet the individual needs of students. Moreover, computer training is provided as a vocational skill for older students with disabilities who express interest. During the visit, the volunteers posed some questions out of curiosity. Subsequently, the volunteers proceeded to the ASD/ADHD Unit, which focuses on providing school readiness training and therapies to children aged 2-6 with Autism and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). The unit's activities include enhancing sitting tolerance, improving communication skills, and providing appropriate sensory stimulation and integration. Additionally, the unit offers personalised, need-based support for older children. They explained the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, as physical interaction with the children became difficult. However, they adapted by utilising video calls and guiding parents on how to assist their children, ultimately overcoming the obstacles they encountered.

At last, the volunteers were first addressed by Mrs. Amvalika Senapati, Senior Advocacy Program Associate, DLU, followed by Mrs. Ketaki Bardalai, the Executive Director of Shishu Sarothi, who provided them with comprehensive insights into the functioning of the NGO. An interactive Q&A session was conducted, allowing the volunteers to gain a deeper understanding of the organisation's operations and activities. Subsequently, Aditya Jha, a third-year student at

NLUJA and senior-member at CDSHL, expressed his gratitude with a vote of thanks. Finally, the visit concluded with a memorable group photograph, capturing the essence of the experience of the volunteers.