

# Guru Gobind Singh Children's Foundation

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## NEW YEAR- NEW LIFE- NEW HOPE!



On January 2, 2011, the listeners of SurSagar gave tremendous support from their hearts to an appeal by host Baltej Singh Pannu to support mentally challenged children at the Navjivini School of Special Education in Patiala, Punjab. The pledges were collected by the volunteers of the Guru Gobind Singh Children's Foundation (GGSCF). In all, over 100 pledges were received, some with a onetime donation and others joining the monthly sponsorship program. The GGSCF would like to thank all those who called into the program offering their support even well after the program was off the air.

As Baltej Singh Pannu explained from personal experience when he was residing in India, these are special children as they need special care and attention and the school provides this in the form of a training program for basic life tasks ranging from eating and getting dressed to education, music, dance and craftwork as well as support for parents of these children. As most parents can understand when a new baby is born, there is so much excitement and joy; unfortunately for these children, the parents go through a lot of turmoil, stress and hardship and looking after these special children is a lifetime responsibility.

Navjivini School provides hope for these parents as a place they can go to get support/training and to cope with life and there are very few such institutions in India. As the name suggests, it provides a "new life" for the children but also the parents. Recently the centre has expanded to cater for those children who have grown to be adults and have no one to look after them. It provides a refuge for these special people and parents can pass on in peace knowing their loved one will have a place to pass their days even when they are here no more. The centre is so well run and so clean that one GGSCF youth who visited the centre said it is so well managed that he has not even seen such a place in Canada. Baltej asked people who visit India to visit the school and said their life will not be the same again.

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## WALK ACROSS CANADA



Balwinder Singh Kahlon started his Walk Across Canada on April 1<sup>st</sup> in St. John's, Newfoundland. On May 28<sup>th</sup>, he arrived in Toronto. The GGSCF went to meet him as he approached Toronto and to assist him in whatever way possible in getting his message out to the community. GGSCF members know from the Run Across Canada the great value of local support and hospitality and tried to return this in support of this remarkable individual as being our minimal responsibility.

Balwinder Singh's message is simple: to raise awareness of drugs and the damage they do to individuals, families and to communities. Surprisingly, his message was simple and primarily focused on alcohol which destroys more lives than the hard drugs. In fact, many would not classify alcohol as a drug. He asked families to discuss these issues at home and parents to be good role models; for example, "asking a child to fetch a bottle of beer from the fridge" implies at a very young age that alcohol is alright and gains acceptance. The acceptance is reinforced with parties and weddings.

Balwinder Singh was greeted by all: media, Gurdwaras, politicians, police, local communities and even those who are struggling with this issue in their homes. The GGSCF wishes him success in this journey as he crosses the country.



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Most of us we cannot even contemplate what these children and their parents have to go through, as we live in a society that focuses very much on ourselves and our needs and wants. It is so refreshing to see a school like Navjivini to re-evaluate our own lives and priorities.



## YOUNG SPORTS CLUB DINNER



On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, members of the Foundation attended an appreciation dinner held by Young Sports Club Toronto. The event took place at Royal King Banquet Hall in Rexdale, Ontario. Young Sports Club Toronto is a club that is highly involved in the Kabbadi circuit in the GTA, and they recognized the Foundation for their achievements. We are thankful to the members of Young Sports Club Toronto for inviting us and recognizing the Foundation.

## VASAKHI SEVA

The GGSCF was involved with four seva efforts over the Vasakhi celebrations.



In association with the Punjab Charity Association there was a food drive across all Gurdwaras in the GTA and also some grocery stores at the weekend. On April 16<sup>th</sup> many of the young children involved with the Punjabi Charity Association stood for hours in the rain collecting donations and placing them in rented vans. The food was transported to the Toronto Daily Food Bank and the Seva Food Bank.

The GGSCF volunteers also helped with One-Match on April 14<sup>th</sup> at Scarborough Gurdwara. This was an effort to collect samples to try to match bone marrow for Noor.



In addition the GGSCF helped at the Seva Food bank on April 17<sup>th</sup> to distribute food to the needy. A lot of time was also spent sorting out the food collected from the food drive reported above.

Last but not least on Sunday April 24, 2011 thousands of Sikhs from across Ontario gathered for the annual Nagar Kirtan from the CNE to Queen's Park. The weather was great as the colourful procession of the Guru Granth Sahib and sangat passed through the streets of Toronto after a morning diwan at the Better Living Centre. Here, langar was also served to thousands. The GGSCF again looked after the buses for the 5th year and the service went off much smoother than last year. There was the usual rush as people came late to the bus stops and most were transported to the start of the procession but some who were late had to be taken straight to Queen's Park. The Foundation did the seva across multiple bus stops from the Greater Toronto Area. While 99% of the sangat enjoy the event and help each other, there were still those who were impatient, those who try to jump the line-ups and critics who complain but never have enough time to come and help. At the end of the day, it is always a great way for the young volunteers to do seva on this day of celebration. The sangat is able to recognize the youth as volunteers who will be able to get them to their bus stop safely because of their bright yellow t-shirts. The volunteers did experience difficulties at a few of the stops and will try to make improvements for the future. Regardless, the 50 young volunteers who managed the buses and sangat were pleased to help in a small way on this celebration.



## LETTER WRITING



At the monthly meeting on February 5<sup>th</sup>, Nimratvir organized a letter writing sessions. Children-youth wrote letters to 80 of the children the GGSCF supports. This was in response to letters sent by those children.

## FAMILY DAY



February 21<sup>st</sup> was the first ever "Family Day" event organized by Scarborough Gurdwara and the GGSCF was invited. Gurdwara Secretary Ajmer Singh Brar asked the GGSCF to identify the programs that the GGSCF runs so that others can join this family. Avneet, Rupri and Sarpreet attended the program and presented the different activities that the GGSCF carries out as well as details of the children that are being sponsored around the world.

## CN TOWER STAIR CLIMB



On Saturday April 16<sup>th</sup>, 39 climbers from the Guru Gobind Singh Children's Foundation took part in the CN Tower

Stair Climb for the World Wildlife Fund. It was the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary for the climb held annually by the WWF. Although it was a wet and windy day, this did not dampen their spirits as they tackled the 1776 steps to the main observation deck. The fastest person up from the GGSCF group was Amandeep Singh Chahal who climbed in 12m27s and set a new record for the GGSCF group. The fastest ever climber was 7m52s and this record was set in 1989. In addition, this was an incredible feat by Amandeep as he was ranked as the 9<sup>th</sup> fastest climber who took part in the public climb that day. Another interesting fact is that the average time to climb the tower is about 30 minutes. All those who participated enjoyed the experience and got a free t-shirt from the WWF. The GGSCF has been taking part in this climb now for 16 years.

## MEETINGS RESUME ACROSS TOWN

February 20<sup>th</sup> marked the return of the monthly meetings of Branch 0311 at Dixie Gurdwara. It also marked the return of many familiar faces in the Peel region to join their fellow volunteers for a short but efficient monthly meeting. The meeting started at 3pm as a few volunteers had just arrived from volunteering at the Seva Foodbank. Ardas was done by Nimratvir, and it was followed up with the introductions from all those in attendance. The GGSCF session included past and future events, with the focus being on the up and coming Nagar Kirtan bus seva completed by the volunteers of the GGSCF for many years. In all, the GGSCF session was very interactive as many of the participants took part in the discussion. Soon after, each participant answered a question for 30 seconds followed with the joke of the month by Nimratvir and Ranbir. To start off the New Year with a meeting at a previous branch is a blessing by Guru Ji, and we hope to continue with this initiative on a bimonthly basis. As further interest grows in the meetings the Foundation will definitely look to increase meetings to a monthly basis. This is a great opportunity for those in the Peel region to get involved in a great team environment.

## CANADA RUNNING SERIES



Despite the cold weather and short notice, volunteers came out to the Sporting Life 10k Marathon on Sunday May 1<sup>st</sup>. It is an event that happens every year in support of cancer research. It is co-ordinated with the Canada Running Series which includes the Scotiabank Marathon in October. This year, the GGSCF was approached by Mandeep Kaur Bal to

help out with the marathon as another organization cancelled. Mandeep rounded up 25 GGSCF volunteers for the event. Volunteers were treated with transportation, snacks and refreshments, and a t-shirt for their time. It was a great opportunity for the Foundation to volunteer with a big event in the City of Toronto. The GGSCF was also one of the biggest groups helping out with the marathon and we were given a huge responsibility of controlling the finish line. It was exciting for the youth, who were volunteering towards the finish line where many of the participants were exhausted and extremely happy to finish the race (and see us of course). The event finished with success and our team leader was very happy with the job we did directing traffic at the finish line and he hoped we would come back next year.



## COMMUNITY RECOGNITION



On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011, members of the GGSCF attended an informative session on the June 1984 attacks on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab. The event took place at the Grand Taj Banquet Hall in Mississauga, across from Ontario Khalsa Darbar. It was organized by Guru Nanak Mission Centre and the Ontario Sikh and Gurdwara Council. Harinder Singh from the Sikh Research Institute and Indira Prahst a professor of sociology conducted the seminar with detailing lecturers on the subject of injustice and human right violations. At the end of the seminar, the Guru Nanak Mission Centre awarded two youth organizations in the community for their success in engaging the youth while

maintaining the principles of our Sikh Gurus. Satnam Kaur and Sundeep Singh accepted the award on the behalf of the GGSCF as they are pictured with Harinder Singh and Harbans Jandali (President of the Ontario Sikh and Gurudwara Council).

## C-SASIL ABILITIES CHALLENGE



On Sunday June 12, volunteers with GGSCF participated in the first ever C-SASIL Abilities Challenge at Brampton Soccer Centre. It was truly a learning experience which helped promote awareness of South Asian Canadians living with disability. The organization entitled Canadian-South Asians Support Independent Living held a wheelchair race to help individuals understand the challenges people living with disability encounter in their daily lives.

It was a memorable experience recalls Nimrat Bhangoo who participated in her first ever wheel chair race. This event allowed her to understand how difficult it can be for people with disability to transfer, move, shift, and adapt in an environment. The Abilities Challenge event was led by Jagdish Grewal and Baltej Pannu. The GGSCF entered a team in the race, which included many members of the community including M.P. Bal Gosal, and famed wrestler Tiger Jeet Singh. The team did very well for their age and experience by finishing fourth overall in the competition. All in all, it was a very successful learning experience for the members of the GGSCF, as this was an unforgettable moment to start off their summer.

## RACE AGAINST RACISM

On June 18<sup>th</sup> the GGSCF team again took part in the "Race Against Racism" 5km run/walk in Mississauga. Peel Police organize the event as a way of bringing the diverse communities together. Mayor Hazel McCallion started the race on a nice hot summer day. After the race food and entertainment was enjoyed by all.

## EDITOR – Sundeep Singh

Time goes by so far especially with school, exams and all the activities the GGSCF has been involved with. April was a busy month but by all of us working together we were able to do seva in areas where we as individuals might not have been able to. Anyway, we are looking towards the summer for more opportunities to help children and communities.

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