

“LEGAL LITERACY CAMP: HOW TO FILE AN APPLICATION UNDER THE R.T.I. ACT”

(Report on the event conducted in Delhi-N.C.R. on 31st May, 2015)

Abstract: This event was conducted by three para-legal volunteers from Legal Aid Centre, S.L.S.-Noida. Firstly, the participants from a slum-village in Kolkotta were informed about their ‘right to file an application under the Act’; later on, they were taught: ‘how they can file such application’, ‘issues about which such applications can be needful for them’, ‘how an appeal can be filed if they don’t receive information’.

Conducted by:
Ms. Sugandha Sharan, Ms. Srishti Girdhar, Ms. Shivani Dang, Ms. Jasveen Kaur, Ms. Srijata Majumdar, & Ms. Aastha Garg (Para-legal Volunteers, Legal Aid Centre, Symbiosis Law School, Noida)

Under the guidance of:
Dr. Madhuker S. (Head – Legal Aid Centre, Symbiosis Law School, Noida)

I. Concept Note

The Legal Aid Centre at Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA has been showing success with its members and its head committed to work for betterment of society. The aforesaid program was part of the endeavour of the Centre in furtherance of its 'aim and objectives'. The areas and topics identified through these programs are of vital importance and extremely necessary to be discussed and acknowledged. With this aim in mind the program was conducted and successfully culminated.

The basic object of the Right to Information Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense. It goes without saying that an informed citizen is better equipped to keep necessary vigil on the instruments of governance and make the government more accountable to the governed. An RTI acknowledges the right to information of citizens to secure access to information under the control of constitutional authorities (the legislative, executive and judiciary) in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. For many, particularly India's poor and disadvantaged; the simple act of filing an RTI application is empowering and can lead to easy solving of daily hassles faced by the oppressed. The legal Literacy Camp on How to File RIT Application was an attempt by the Legal Aid Centre towards this empowerment.

II. Objectives

The foremost objective of this program was to familiarise the target population with the importance and the procedure of filing a RIT application and about the avenues of redressal along with the following:

- Aware the mass of their legal right to access information from defaulting authorities.
- Making them well-versed with the procedure of filing an RTI
- Aware them of the benefits of filing an RTI (How simple village problems, like non-construction of roads or accumulation of sewage leading to unhealthy environment can be sought answers to.)
- The recourse that can be taken by them in case an RTI is not answered.

III. Preliminary Preparations

Before conducting the event, certain steps were required to be taken in order to prepare of the event. These were:

- The centre members did extensive research and study, and prepared posters, banners and pamphlets relating to the topic. These were then printed out in different sizes depending on their usage.
- The centre members contacted the previous Sarpanch of a village in Gurgaon, who helped setup for the awareness campaign in the village.
- The posters and banners were pasted in an enclosure, where a number of villagers gathered.
- The target audience were identified to be the senior citizens of the village as they have great influence in their families as well as the village at large.
- The topics were divided between the members and the members took turns to talk about the topic, and answer the frequently asked questions.

IV. Conducting the Event

We visited the Gurgaon Village for sensitizing the people. A room right next to the village was arranged for us where people from the village had gathered. We started with the event by introducing ourselves and telling them a little about our college and the initiative taken by the Legal Aid Centre of the college for sensitizing people about issues of day-to-day importance. The pamphlets were distributed to the people so that they could read through during our dialogue with them.

We then moved on to the first topic i.e. “how to file application under the R.T.I. Act?” The first and the most important thing was told to them that right to information is a right conferred upon us just like any other right and we should use this right for our benefit.

Further, we told the people who had gathered that the process of filing an RTI application is very simple and the fees to be given is minimal and therefore, it is very easy to obtain information from the public authorities.

V. Response of the Target Population

The target population comprised of all the senior citizens of the village. All of them were pleased to know about their right to information and its applicability in the public domain. They were eager to know about it more and more and thus asked their queries making the whole session an interactive one. Most of them had the query as to the time limit, expiration of the time limit i.e. the remedy of no response after 30 days from the filling of the RTI application, the kind of application filled, how is it to be filled, the fee required while submitting the application and the place of deposit for the same. They wanted to see the application of RTI in real and wanted to see proper filling process of the same. Moreover, they showed more interest in the incidents and examples of RTI, which acted as a motivational force for them and thus created an impact.

VI. Future Plan of Action

A lot of people in target population knew about the act but were unaware of the process of filing an application under the act and the appeal procedure also there major issues were with respect to water and electricity supply in their village. Some of the villagers had filled an RTI under the said act and hasn't received the reply of their application till date. So the provided information was not enough as it was simply text book knowledge which they were more or less already aware of. They needed more practical approach towards it. So the next step should be to go back to them and provide them practical knowledge by helping them in filling the application on their behalf and same about the procedure of an appeal.

VII. Suggestions/Feedback

Though the event was an overall success, but there is always room for improvement. The following suggestions will certainly help in the same:

- To start with, there should be a meeting conducted with all the centre members and a briefing should be done in order to make everyone familiar with the aim and objective of the program and provided with all the necessary information.

- Before finalising about conducting the event all the members should be given an opportunity to give their inputs as to how the event can be better conducted.
- Proper Training session should be conducted by experts in the field of RTI so that all the members are well versed with the nuances of the Act.
- Involving other cells of the collage, like the theatre cell. This will bring versatility in the center's approach like bringing awareness by the way of Skits/ Street Plays.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

The event was overall had a success story with enriching experience to the participating members and going with the positive response of the villagers, it was an educational experience for them as well. We were surprised with their knowledge about the RIT Act. We learned from them as much as they did from us. We identified our shortcomings from their responses. This will surely help us improve for our future endeavours.





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List of 'office bearers' of Legal Aid Centre, Symbiosis Law School, Noida

Sl. No.	Name	Profile	Contact No.
1	Dr. Madhuker S. (Asstt. Prof. of Law)	Head	9811083999
2	Ms. Sugandha Sharan (Batch 2011-16)	Convener	9654140774
3	Mr. Aakash Gakhar (Batch 2012-17)	Co-convener	9958187490
4	Ms. Aerika Singh (Batch 2012-17)	Para-legal Volunteer	8882880000
5	Ms. Shivani Dang (Batch 2012-17)	Para-legal Volunteer	9650800500
6	Ms. Srishti Girdhar (Batch 2013-18)	Para-legal Volunteer	9871017608
7	Ms. Jasveen Kaur (Batch 2013-18)	Para-legal Volunteer	9911121638
8	Ms. Maithili Moondra (Batch 2013-18)	Para-legal Volunteer	8826307196
9	Mr. Yash Kotak (Batch 2013-18)	Para-legal Volunteer	8527272859
10	Ms. Srijata Majumdar (Batch 2013-18)	Para-legal Volunteer	9871855424
11	Ms. Antara Rastogi (Batch 2013-19)	Para-legal Volunteer	8030887782
12	Ms. Nayanika Ruia (Batch 2013-18)	Para-legal Volunteer	8826779686
13	Ms. Nikhita Kansal (Batch 2014-19)	Para-legal Volunteer	9814843024
14	Ms. Sohini Chaudhary (Batch 2014-19)	Para-legal Volunteer	9088100513
15	Ms. Aastha Garg (Batch 214-19)	Para-legal Volunteer	9999510912

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Mr. Saurabh Vamsi (Batch 2014-19)

7042254054

Para-legal Volunteer

Email: lac@symlaw.edu.in