

Formation of Navjivan Vadil Kendra.

Research has shown that the incidence of heart problems, diabetes and depression is much higher amongst the South Asians in this country compared to the general population. It is also a fact that due to lack of command in English language, and strict vegetarian diet, the elderly and retired Indians in particular tend to stay at home, leading an inactive life style. Life expectancy has been enhanced by developments in medical science. Many of us do not really know how to enjoy or spend our retired life. While spending our life earning a living, hardly any interests have been developed for the retired life. As the elder population keeps growing, the government knows that lot of voluntary efforts will be needed to look after this segment of the population. The concept is that the community members should be encouraged to lead a more active retired life, show a way to lead a healthier lifestyle, and create an atmosphere that could help to reduce their depression. With this concept in mind, the idea to establish this organisation came to fruition.

To implement this project, a meeting of like minded people was held on 5th January 2007 at Sayer Centre in Cricklewood, London where the Navjivan Vadil Kendra (meaning “New Life Elders Centre”) was formed. The objectives were set out as follows:

- Bring out those people who tend to stay at home and are inactive in their retired life.
- Teach them yoga, which has been proven as the best way to keep fit and healthy. To involve everyone in yoga would be our priority.
- Encourage companionship to bring joy in their lives, and help to reduce incidence of depression.
- Organise parties on special occasions and festive seasons.
- Arrange day outings to sea side resorts and other places which would improve the quality of their lives , and bring joy. Indirectly this will reduce the depression in their lives.
- To provide card and board games to stimulate their brains and keep them mentally active in their older age.
- Organise health seminars, and promote reflexology, immobility exercises etc to inculcate greater health awareness.
- Encourage members to visit museums, shows, plays etc and encourage them to participate in cultural activities.
- Offer help and advice to members in filling forms, writing letters and pursuing problems with relevant authorities.
- Week end trips have been organised which allow for forming more friendships and developing companionship amongst members.

To implement these objectives a place to meet on a regular basis was first priority. With experienced and enthusiastic community volunteers, the work to establish a well constituted organisation was undertaken swiftly. A Constitution was drafted and approved and a committee was elected. A bank account was established. A yoga tutor (Dipak Jashapara) was identified who agreed to attend on a regular basis every Thursday. His yoga presentation became popular and the time of yoga classes was extended from one hour to two hours.

Some funds were raised when Jayant Doshi sought sponsorship for his trek to Makalu Bas Camp. A few grant applications were made, and after initial disappointments, some grant applications became successful. All formalities were completed to get Charity Registration, and we were a recognised Charity by end of 2007. From July 2007, a monthly newsletter was introduced to keep members informed when membership reached 167 and it was decided not to take any more members. At first the newsletter was published in Gujarati and English, though after that it has been published in English only. However, later those on waiting list were taken on and the total membership reached 221. Attendance at yoga sessions kept increasing and space became a problem. A new larger hall was found and in October 2008 we moved to Sangam Hall, Colindale London. More members were taken on and the total membership reached 337 when it was decided to stop taking any more members. A web site has been created with voluntary service from a member without any expense to the Kendra.

The Kendra has succeeded in fulfilling most of the objectives, and the activities in its short history include:

- Over 120 members take part in two hours of yoga every Thursday with great enthusiasm;
- About 15 members play bukhari regularly, and about 30 members have learnt bridge, and play the game;
- Three to four day trips per annum has become the norm;
- Two very successful 6 day yoga retreats were attended to full capacity;
- Visits to theatre, museums etc have been encouraged and attended by members;
- Diwali, New Year and Gandhi Jayanti parties have become part of the regular activities; the parties have bingo and antakshri as entertainment;
- We had visit from Mayor of Brent, and some councillors FROM Brent, Barnet and Harrow during this period.
- Members have benefited from talk and demonstrations by eminent people from India.
- Members get an opportunity their special day such as birthday or anniversary by sponsoring a lunch.