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Sidak 2012: 14 days, 3 tracks of learning, 25 revolutionaries

San Antonio, TX—The weekend of 4-5 August, 25 young adults hailing from the US, Canada, England and Scotland flew in to San Antonio, Texas, for the tenth year of Sikh Research Institute's annual leadership development retreat: Sidak – Faith. Courage. Discipline.



As they were arriving on site, getting keys, meeting roommates, acclimating to the heat of a Texas summer, news began to break that there had been a targeted shooting in a gurdwara in Wisconsin. Sikhs were dead and injured, police had been injured in the standoff, the suspect had been killed. Little else was known.



Within 48 hours, the Sidakers clamored to change the schedule of events so that they could be a part of national efforts to educate and inform others about Sikhi. Once they were equipped with the supplies they needed and a little free time, they created posters, talking points, and practiced their approaches and answers in preparation to go before the general public. In these moments, the attendees at this leadership development retreat exposed themselves as the leaders they already knew how to be. ***"In true Sikh spirit, the youth at Sidak grasped the opportunity to engage and build relationships with the San Antonio community in light of the Wisconsin Gurdwara shootings,"*** said Charandeep Singh, Sikhi 201 participant from Scotland. ***"A tragic occurrence was met with unwavering unity."***

After attending an interfaith service hosted at Temple Beth'El in downtown San Antonio, the Sidakers hit the streets of the city and in less than two hours interacted with more than 100 locals. On the way back to the site that evening, the bus was filled with the excited recounting of the people they had met, the questions they had been asked, the minds that had been opened. The hopeful chatter soon faded into the peaceful recitation of the *Rahiras* (evening prayers).



In addition to the unexpected opportunity to put community organizing to work, the days were filled with the hustle and bustle that defines the Sidak experience. Going through one of three tracks of study—Sikhi 101, Sikhi 201, and Gurmukhi 101—participants managed to fit in hours of reading, passionate discussions, vocabulary homework, and paper writing.



The heat of the afternoon was often passed sharing ideas and techniques for memorizing the intricate grammar of Gurbani, practicing sabads together in the divan hall, and preparing for the annual speech competition. ***"The amazing thing about Sidak is that it incorporates all the aspects of Sikhi into a college-level learning environment. The discipline and dedication required to sustain the pace of sixteen-hour days, back to back classes, and morning***

and evening divans, was a character building challenge," said Keerat Kaur, Sikhi 101 participant from California.

Besides those who came to Texas to teach Sidak courses: Inderpreet Singh (Sikhi 101), Harinder Singh (Sikhi 201) and Surender Pal Singh (Gurmukhi 101), and the board members who flew in to assist in the classrooms over the two weeks of Sidak, volunteers from the community came to support students with learning their sabads, to lead sessions on public speaking, to judge the speech competition, and to offer their experience and advice during the first Sidak career day.

The local sangat also filled the kitchen with laughter and the smells of home cooked meals and snacks three times a day. From fajitas to saag, Italian to Thai, every meal was prepared with careful attention. Evenings were filled with exercise in the pool, nature walks, Sikhi-themed board games, and late night study sessions in the blanketing warmth of a Texas summer night. Ravinder Singh, Executive Director of SikhRI, commented on the strong community support that drives so much of the energy at Sidak: ***"Sikhi is all about community service (seva). Sikhs thrive on it. What we witnessed at Sidak is the epitome of seva. We are truly grateful to the local San Antonio sangat who give so selflessly of their time, energy and talents year after year."***



The 2012 retreat marked the second year that Junior Sidak was offered. Besides young ones who came with their parents to Sidak, local children came out to the site to learn with Harliv Kaur. Playing games, making crafts, and learning new songs and sakhis, the hours of Junior Sidak were packed with engaging ways to increase Panjabi and Gurmukhi skills and the youngsters' comfort with the lessons of Gurbani and the history of Sikhi.



Midway through the second week, SikhRI hosted the annual Infinite Wisdom Day panel discussion, on the theme "Occupy: Interplay of Faith, Economics & Politics." There were eight members of the local interfaith community on the panel who spoke to an audience of some 70 people. You can [read the PR from this event](#), and [watch recording of the live stream](#) on SikhRI's YouTube channel.

Even as the Sidakers were leaving to catch their flights home, there was a sense of mission and purpose that marked another year as a success. ***"Sidak is not meant to be a vacation from work or school, or a series of lessons that you learn and never have to engage with or reflect on again,"*** said Jasmine Kaur, SikhRI's Director of Education and Sidak Coordinator. ***"It is meant to be a training ground, a source of creative inspiration and passion that is only just beginning in these two weeks. For Sidak to be what it is truly supposed to be, in the eyes of SikhRI, the best should be yet to come as another year of young Sikh men and women return to their sangats and prepare to put into action their time here."***