

### Visit to CFH on February 20, 2015

(Arpana and Amit from Concern for Humanity (CFH)  
Doris and Klaus from noon.ch)

Our first meeting with Arpana and Amit took place in our accommodation, where we were able to talk quietly.

As we learned, the organization CFH of Arpana and Amit still works with nine Learning Centres (abbreviated LC). During the last year, five of these LCs were supported by noon.ch together with the Indian organization Asha. There are no plans to either close one of the Learning Centres or open a new one.



*The teacher Arpana, Klaus and Doris in front of the Learning Centre*

There was an organizational change in so far as we are no longer sharing the costs with the main office of "Asha for Education", which is resident in the United States, but with the Asha-Chapter in Frankfurt. We all expressed our hope that working together with Asha Frankfurt, last year's situation would not repeat itself, when Asha US had stopped payments and noon.ch had been asked if we could take over Asha's costs as well. So we agreed for a limited period. It was Rohini Muthuswami from the Asha Chapter Delhi who helped us to find the solution with Asha Frankfurt. We left no doubt in the conversation that we were not prepared to simply double our costs and therefore suggested to separate "our" LCs from those of Asha.

The new CFH-office is not far from the slum area on the southern outskirts of Delhi and is now used in diverse ways: for storing teaching materials, for the meetings of the teachers with the coordinator of the LCs and as a classroom in which teachers are trained. Just as the children, the teachers live in the slum area, thus sharing their social background. Already during our last year's visit Rohini of Asha had told us that the children were making too little progress and that this was due to the limited capabilities of the teachers.

There are also plans using the office for schooling older girls whose parents do not let them go to school in the city.



*<-- Arpana and teachers during our visit to the LCs -->*



The practical implementation of seemingly small changes often proves difficult in detail. Teachers are expected to teach children from form 1 - to 12, which puts a severe strain on them. They are quite capable of teaching all subjects - except English - up to form 10, but for the children of the LCs about to start with the forms 11 and 12 we should find other teachers as well as rent at least one more room for mathematics and English lessons.

We asked if it was possible to finance an English teacher from the city at least for 6 weeks during the children's holidays. Arpana and Amit estimated the costs for teaching and transport at 30,000 INR (450 SFr). For the five LCs we would need two teachers.

James, who is responsible for the project at noon.ch, brought up the question of a health and nutrition programme for CFH. Arpana confirmed our assumption that the children were suffering from anaemia and worms, but said that Amit and she would not like to take over the responsibility for such a programme, as it would entail organizing doctors, providing medicine and carrying out follow-up examinations and tests. But she told us about health programmes being carried out in schools now and promised they would try to make the children aware of these issues with the help of the teachers.



*Snacks for the children of the LCs*

We also discussed the connection between diet and anaemia and asked if they could imagine organizing a grant for fruits for the children, which proposal Arpana will consider.

This year, we did not bring books but sweet snacks, because to Arpana it had seemed more practical than buying bananas and oranges. Not what we would have wished for, but Arpana argued that the children never got anything like that.

Another issue we wanted to raise this winter was the problematic toilet-situation in the LCs which Rohini of Asha had brought to our attention last winter. Nobody knows where the children find a safe spot to relieve themselves. Arpana and Amit saw difficulties in setting up a toilet in the walled yard of the little house. For one thing, they know that if they increase the value of the rented property by putting up a toilet, the landlord will rent out the little house to other tenants. "Contracts are useless", we were told, "as we are in an area without rights". For another thing, this big slum area neither has a sewage system nor water pipes. A tanker comes at irregular intervals, filling a kind of rain barrel with water. Keeping a toilet clean under these circumstances seems difficult to us.



Perhaps Amit can reach an agreement with the neighbour on whose land the new little toilet house has been built. None of us knows how to keep it clean without running water.

*Little toilet house without water supply*

We asked about the most important change occurring in this area with about 200,000 inhabitants in the past 10 years. There are electricity and TVs now. Some buses run from here to the town centre of Delhi. The basis of life has not really improved, however, because not only the wages, but also the food prices, rents and transport costs have risen.

The mothers do contract work at home and the fathers go to town by bus as day labourers. Amit knew that only on half of the working days a month the men would find work. But even if they did not, they would still have to pay the bus fares.

The last questions we asked Arpana and Amit were about the children in the LCs. James wanted to know how the self-confidence - of the girls in particular - is strengthened. Since especially the girls stay 5 to 6 years in the LCs, Arpana can observe how their personalities develop. There are no school dropouts anymore. The fact that the children have been coming voluntarily all these years is a sign that they appreciate this place which is to be their own space - according to Arpana. In addition to

doing revision and deepening the subject matter, there is teaching of handiwork, reading stories and playing in the yard.

Arpana told us of a girl who was keen to learn from a special "textbook" which the teacher could not provide. So she asked the teacher for Arpana's phone number, to phone her herself and enquire about the "textbook". Does this not show that the girls are learning both to act on their own initiative and express their desires? Furthermore, the girls enjoy performing dances and theatre plays when it comes to celebrate a feast day. Arpana assured us that the girls' self-esteem was good.

Meeting the children of the five LCs, we could convince ourselves that they were not too shy to talk to us. Arpana translated for us. Especially the children of the class with the older girls enjoyed telling us about themselves. They and their siblings - most of them have two – live with their parents in this slum area of Delhi. In case the grandparents are still alive, they often live with the family. Some of the children, however, told us about visits to their grandparents in Rajasthan, Bihar or Uttar Pradesh.



*Learning Centre with a small fenced yard.*

In relation to the nutrition programme we wanted to know what they liked to eat and in fact, it was fruits like mangoes, oranges, grapes and bananas that turned out to be the favourites. But rarely do these children get to eat fruits at all. Their favourite school subject is English which they learn as a second language. Unfortunately, the children show some deficits in spoken English. When asked what profession they wanted to take up, they did not have anything to say. They do not seem to have any role models.



*School class in the LC*

When we wanted to know what was their biggest fear the children got very excited. They said that the day before a big monkey had entered their classroom. With great presence of mind, one of the older boys had hurled his schoolbag against it and the monkey had disappeared. The children are also afraid of snakes and wild dogs. The monkeys come from the Wildlife Sanctuary next to the Sanjay colony. The Indian government established it there about 20 years ago. The monkey population is growing rapidly and is looking for food in the residential area. We saw them ourselves on the roofs of the small houses.



Finally, we wanted to know what wishes the children had. They expressed a variety of wishes: a dress, shoes, a doll, a bike or a big house. Then they agreed that they would like to go on a picnic with us outside their settlement area. We later asked Arpana if she sometimes made excursions with the children, and she said, “No”, indicating that the responsibility would be too large. Arpana assumed that some of the children probably had never once left the settlement.



*In the background one of the Learning Centres*

Visitors' report by Doris Eckstein, noon.ch, at "Concern for Humanity"  
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