

Progress report

September 2013

Providing basic education to poor, deprived and vulnerable children in slums of Delhi.

About the project –

Noon.ch and ASHANET have been kind enough to support the learning centers project for Concern for Humanity. Both Noon.ch and ASHANET share the total cost of running the five centers and each provide funding assistance upto 50% of the total cost for running 5 learning centers. As part of the project, funds have been provided for meeting teachers' salary, centers' running cost, for purchase of books and stationary for children, for organizing some events for children and for meeting the project related overheads.

Activities at Centres –

Shifting of two centres – The centres from the Bhatti Kala and Bhatti Khurd villages were shifted to new slum area, namely, **Sanjay colony**. From the past two months it was being noticed that the attendance at the two village centres was going down. The teachers informed that many children had moved away with their families from the village to neighbouring villages in Gurgaon and to Sanjay colony due to economic reasons (high rentals and poor work opportunities). Hence, we looked for alternate location for starting new centres in replacement of the two village centres. **The two centres started running in January 2013**. At the time of Rohini's visit, the children at these two centres had begun to settle. Hence she did not visit the two new centres.

Sanjay colony is the oldest slum in the area and it's further away on the same route as Bhatti Kala and Bhatti Khurd. It's a needy area and has big population. The centres have been set-up in the needy locations where the number of primary aged children is more.

Centre for senior students– The centre for the senior students has received a warm welcome from the community. A few students other than our centre students have also taken admission here. Students have been regularly coming to the centre and benefiting from the centre facilities. In order to meet specific academic needs of students, a few reference books have been provided at the

centre so that children can benefit from the books. In-between, there was a little turmoil at the centre as the centre teacher changed. Ms. Aasmin, their teacher had taken break for completing her studies. The new teacher was unable to cope with the compounded syllabus. However, Aasmin has now come back and the centre is on the progressive mode.

Grammar books and dictionaries for the centres – this year at each centre, English and Hindi grammar books were made available to help teachers in teaching languages to children. To our surprise, initially, some of the teachers themselves needed mentoring support in the use of grammar books. Teachers were familiarised in the use of grammar books. Later, they were able to teach children the English and Hindi grammar using the books. Lately, English to Hindi dictionaries have been provided to each centre teacher so that they can improve their own as well as children's vocabulary.

Reading practice – Since the past few months, book reading everyday for half an hour has been made mandatory at each centre. This means that teacher has to facilitate loud reading in the class by students who can read. Children choose a book from the library section and read it out to the group. Teacher corrects the students in case they wrongly pronounce some words. The younger kids listen to the stories read by older children. This new activity is helping to improve reading skills of children, which is the stepping stone for developing mastery over the language. At present this activity is being done only for Hindi language book reading.

Training of teachers in English language – In the month of January, 2013, Ms. Kathryn MacPhee, a retired vice principal, from Perth, Australia visited our centres. Kathy has been teaching from past 40 years and has been supporting, guiding and moulding teachers in the schooling system in Perth, Australia. She has been specifically involved with children who have recently arrived in Perth or are on refugee status and for whom English is a new language. It involves not only teaching the language but skills that are essential to help integrate them into mainstream schooling. Kathy spent three days with us and during this period she taught teachers on story-telling techniques, how to use story telling as a medium for starting a discussion with children on issues concerning them and their personality development. She had brought a few educational games on English language. She explained to teachers and to students. Later, she made children play those games. Children loved playing these games and communicating in English.

Kathy left with us some more games. We got the sets made for each learning centre and got them laminated for use by children.

On her return to Perth, Kathy wrote back to us a very encouraging mail. An excerpt from the mail is here:

"Firstly, thank you very much for agreeing to take me to the Learning Centres and thank you to Sameera for introducing me to you both. It was a

gamble as none of us really had any idea if what I had to offer would be of any real use.

I admire what you are doing for the children and the communities. You have achieved such a lot. I can't begin to imagine the work that goes into setting these centres up and keeping them running. I am very impressed.

I would love to visit you again if I plan to visit India next year. Please let me know if I can be of some help. I will plan my program accordingly”.

Kathy would be visiting us again in January 2014.

Birthday informer at centres – At every centre, poster charts have been put up with birthdays of all children of the centre. The planner is divided into 12 months and pictures of children with birthdays have been mentioned in respective columns. This has been done to bring a cheer among children and make them feel special on their birthdays. Also, this is being looked at as an opportunity for children to know their date of birth.

Making of Snowman – Like every year, this year the theme for Christmas vacations was making snowman. During December vacation, children made snowman at their respective centres. Many children had no idea about ‘what is a snowman?’ and how it looked like or what is its relation to the Christmas festival. When we showed them the pictures of the snowman, children could easily relate it. Many of them had seen a snowman outside shops as part of Christmas decoration. Some of the children got so excited that they not only participated in making a big snowman for the centre but they also made small personal snowmen.

Children used their creativity to make snowman. They asked us to provide them with polyfill for covering the body of the snowman, round baskets for making skeleton of the snowman, material for decoration. The snowman making activity culminated into the celebration of annual day at the respective centres.

Annual Day celebration – In January, the annual day was celebrated at each centre. With every passing year, this function is becoming one of the most awaited and grandly celebrated events of the year. We try to keep the annual day celebration an indoor affair due to local reasons of social security of children. At some of the centres where there was enough space the parents also attended the program. The Bapu Camp and Shambhu Colony centres organised a combined program in a big hall. The annual day celebration helps to boost up children’s morale and welcome the new year with a positive note.

Children prepared songs, skits, dances, recitations for presentation on this day. Also, competitions were organized, and prizes were given away to the winners. All children received goody bags. Chilling winter could not stop children’s enthusiasm and energy. Children did the anchoring of the program and it was a big fun party for them as well as for us.

Visit of Rohini, ASHANET – In February, Rohini from ASHANET visited the learning centres for doing an annual review of the progress made at the centres. She visited four out of six centres. During the visit, she met with the children and the teachers and discussed about the centres' progress. Some of the kids performed skit and dances in front of her. She was satisfied with the progress and was much happy to meet with the girls who have moved into the centre for senior grade students. She said, "I find a lot of confidence in these girls".

Summer vacations - Like last year, many children went to their villages during summer vacations. Keeping in view this trend, immediately at the beginning of the summer vacations, the learning centre teachers helped children to complete their holiday home works so that before children go away on vacation, their holiday homework is complete. And with the remaining children who stayed back in the town, the teachers re-decorated the centres with new posters, children's work, etc. Some of the centres got a face lift as the landlords were kind enough to get them white washed.

Theme charts – Like last year, during the summer vacation time, children helped their teachers in preparing new theme charts. This summer vacation the theme for the summer camp was to prepare big wall size poster-charts on a select theme. Children joined chart papers to make a big wall size paper and made big posters. Children came out with amazing ideas and each poster looked so majestic and meaningful.

Library books – The library corners which were set up last year on the suggestion of Dorris and Klaus, continued to attract lot of readership by children. We were asked to get new sets of books. Children loved to read short story books with a moral; with lots of pictures and animated characters. We purchased new books and rotated the sets amongst the five centres.

Iron fortification program – This season in all the Delhi government schools, the health department launched an iron fortification program. As per the program all children would be given iron / folic acid tablets once every fortnight.

Our centre teachers had done class discussion with the children to encourage them not to miss the school on the day of the fortification day and that they should take the oral medicine for overcoming the problem of anaemia and weakness._

Visit by a Yoga group – Recently, in second week of September, CFH had a few visitors from Switzerland who were here in Delhi on their way from Ladakh after a meditation and yoga camp. They visited some of the centres, spent time with the children and appreciated the work being done by Concern for Humanity. _

Celebration of Independence Day – This year, due to unexpected but heavy rains, the celebration of the Independence day got affected a little. All the celebrations had to be confined to the learning centre room as outside there was water clogging. Children had prepared small speeches, dances on patriotic songs

and skits to mark the occasion. They wore fancy dresses for performances but due to rain they could not perform as planned. At one of the Sanjay Colony centres, children had to completely do away with the cultural programme as a sudden shower made accessibility to the centre difficult. After a long wait for the rain to stop, children were given away their goody bags and this made children a little happy.

Children's progress –

This year the result of students was quite satisfactory. All children passed the exams with good results. Two of our girl students from the senior girls centre, came second in their classes.

We are extremely happy to inform that there are around 132 children regularly coming to our 5 centres. Over the years there has been a stability among children and the dropout rate has reduced to minimum. Children are moving to next grades and their performance has been improving. The parents are also extremely cooperative and do not withhold children at home unless there is any urgent need. All this is being made possible by the untiring effort of the teachers. The teachers provide all kinds of support to children and that is one reason why parents have no hesitation in sending their children, especially girls, to the centre.

At present all five centers are running at the same time, that is, from 1.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Challenges –

Space for learning centres - The centre rental costs are increasing sharply due to the increased cost of living. Despite best efforts to keep the rentals low, the room rentals of the learning centres are now almost the same as the salary that we pay to the teachers for the part time job. Even though we pay the demanded rentals, there is always a fear that we may be asked to vacate the premises any time. In case the landlord gets someone to pay more rental, we will be asked to vacate. With the result, all the efforts that were put-in in decorating the room in making it a lively place for children go waste. At times this also affects the continuity of children to the centre as the distance to the centre is one of the primary determinants for children to enroll in the learning centres.

We always try to look for a room which is big and well ventilated and has some open space in front for children to be able to play and do some activities. This also costs more money.

Change in boys-girls ratio at centres – At the start of this academic season, post summer vacations, the Delhi Government issued orders regarding re-organizing the school shifts. The earlier co-education schools were converted into only girls' schools and only boys' schools. Now all girls go to school in the morning and the boys go in the afternoon shift. This has affected enrolment of boys at the learning centres as the boys attend the schools when the learning centres open.

In all the learning centres, majority of the students are now girls. This has been a benefit in disguise as more girls have got the opportunity to enrol in the centres.

Staff induction –

We are happy to share that we have a new teacher in the CFH family. She is Ms. Rose Aftab. She is the daughter of our senior most teacher, Ms. Shaila Parveen and she has taken over the charge from her mother for the Bapu Camp centre. Rose has recently completed her intermediate and is now pursuing graduation. She is an old hand with CFH as a volunteer as she had been teaching kids occasionally when some teacher went on leave. She has become a seasoned teacher and has been attending teacher meetings with her mother. Children are happy to learn from her as she mixes very well with them. This has been a smooth transition of teacher as the children did not get affected.

Snowball effect of funding support from noon.ch and ASHANET

As always, the funding from Noon.ch and ASHANET has been of immense support to us. We get a large number of enquiries from individuals and groups. We have become quite visible. We are expecting a group of international volunteers sometimes in January 2014.