

Report from Rohini's site-visit at CFH, August 4th 2017

I just got back from the site visit. I visited both the morning and the evening centers. So here are my impressions:

The Morning centers - One in **Bapu Colony** and the other in **Sanjay Colony** were full when we went. The children were bit impatient because they had a test and wanted to get to the school in time for it. There are about 30-35 children enrolled in each of the center. About 85% of the children were present when I went. I was happy to note that teacher Shaila's class consisted only of boys. I had been pestering her to include boys in her center and was hope to note that the participation of boys has now really increased. I did not ask much because I did not want to spook them just before a test.

What I noticed was **the centers were well-ventilated and every available inch of wall was plastered with paintings and charts, making it very colorful**. The center in Sanjay colony where Usha, Chahat's sister-in-law, now teaches was especially nice. The children too had come ready to go to school so they were in uniforms. A cooler was working as was a fan. So this center was really well maintained. Usha runs two sessions in the morning- From 8 to 10.30 and then from 11 to 12.30. Then in the evening she runs the school from 4 to 5pm. The timings of the center are posted at the door in all centers.

The Evening centers were also full. In the center where Shaila and Vandana teach, Vandana's class was preparing Rakhi for the Rakshabandhan festival (August 7th). Shaila's class was busy preparing the multiplication table. I asked one girl- Nisha- to recite the table of 5. She was able to do it without any problems. In Vandana's class, I asked Lakshmi what she was studying in the 10th class.

Arpana had already briefed me about the changes occurring in schools- the No-detention policy has been removed, Board exams have been introduced in 10th class and the **curriculum has been made tough**. And I had already found out how tough when I my M.Sc. students told me that they learnt Mendel's laws (basic principles of genetics) in class 10th. Then girls at the center told me that in English they had to choice of two books- Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift and Three Men in a boat by Jerome K. Jerome. Honestly, I do not know which idiot in the government prescribed Three Men in A Boat. It is a lovely book but not meant for kids who have such a tenuous grasp of the language. The girls told me that they had read Gulliver's travel which means that the teacher in the school had decided to teach that book to the children. I am not sure whether she can convey the satire and I am sure that the children are going to put off by English books after this experience.

I also looked through the **10th class science book** and asked Lakshmi bunch of questions. She was able to answer them- in Biology they have learnt about photosynthesis and amoeba till now. Mendel's law is part of the course but they have not reached that part yet. Arpana asked whether I can teach Science. I have rashly promised to do chemistry and biology with them. I am not competent to teach physics or math. Let us see how it will work out.

The center which was **most pathetic** was the one where Shazia teaches. It is a small room and the fan is not sufficient. Crammed with the children in the heat and humidity, I really wonder how much they can learn.

Changes introduced this year:

1. Arpana said that they have used ASER tests (designed by Pratham) to **evaluate the learning process**. They did the tests at the beginning of the previous academic year and again at the end of the academic year. They have found a distinct change. The test categorises children into 4 groups-

- A group who have good **grasp of reading and writing**,
- B who can read and write but not very fluently,
- C who need help, and then
- D are the one with the rudimentary grasp.

Most of the children had fallen into B and C when they took the test in the beginning. At the end of the year they had moved a group. Arpana also said that the teachers too had found out through the test the areas that they need to work on. So it appears to have helped.

2. The children have been encouraged to **write articles, stories, and poems** which CfH is going to collate. I asked a girl in Meneka's center to read the poem she had written. She read it very fluently. I feel that the children are learning and certainly they are doing better year by year.

3. **Nutrition is a problem**. They are giving packaged food like peanuts, Channa and Moong dal (lentils). Fruits and are expensive and because of the new tax regime every bill has to be now accounted for. So just like what Mala (Sadrag) told, CfH too can get fruits only from Mother Dairy outlets which will then provide a bill. There are no nearby Mother Dairy outlets and one person will be needed to ferry fruit from an outlet to each of the center. It does not seem feasible at this point.

4. The teachers have been encourage to **teach in a center other than their own** for one day (usually a Saturday). The idea is that each teacher might be good in one subject and so she can impart her knowledge to other.

5. **Vijay is the field coordinator**. He has been with them for little more than a year. He has just completed class 12 and is a middle-aged man. He blends into the society that he is dealing with. The teachers trust him as do the students. He knows the area and is able to work with both the teachers and the children. His own family resides in Kannauj and he lives in Delhi. He seems to be a stable man and I hope he continues with CfH.

6. **The offices**- The main office where CfH operates from is in Shahpur Jat. They have additionally taken a small room in Rajpura which is close to all the centers. This room acts as a warehouse for storing books, bags, stationery items (all of which they buy in bulk from Nai Sarak at a cheaper rate) as well as for nutrition packages. They also hold teachers meeting in this room. This small room is being funded by noon.ch and other organisations.

7. One time funding that Asha Frankfurt gave was used to buy school bags and durries. The durrie at the center where Usha teaches is ready for replacement. Other than that **they really did not have any major requirement**. However, if money is available, I am sure they can find things that they would need.

8. **Wall o Books**- This organization has helped them **set up libraries**. Each center has one wall dedicated to the library. The organization helped the children to paint/set up a tree. And then set up space for putting books up. They donated the first lot and it is supposed to be a long-term commitment but it depends on how much money they are able to generate. However, CfH itself has purchased some books. The older kids wanted guide books and CfH has made that also available.

These are the positive things. Then there are negatives. Things that neither I nor CfH anticipated. It is do with the **children growing up, becoming adolescent and the problems that come with that**. These are difficult to solve and I anticipate Arpana and CfH will have to engage and try to solve these problems.

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