

Vocational Training for Nishtha Jagaran Girls (2014-2016)

**Report by Anu Bulusu and Padmanava Sen – Asha for Education, Atlanta
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Background:

During a site visit to Nishtha Jagaran in December 2013 by Atlanta volunteer Anu, the girls of Nishtha Jagaran expressed keen interest in undergoing Spoken English and computer training and obtaining jobs to become financially independent as opposed to getting married. After some research on vocational training centers in and around Kolkata, Anu/Asha Atlanta approached Father Tomy, Director of Don Bosco Tech based out of Liluah, Kolkata to conduct spoken English and computer training to the Jagaran girls. Don Bosco has a strong reputation of conducting 3-month crash course in Spoken English and computer training (6 days a week for 3 months, followed by placement in retail outlets in and around Kolkata). Don Bosco also conducts advanced training for girls such as Yamaha motorcycle assembly, house wiring/bread board etc. to more advanced training such as machine shop operators, AutoCAD based design etc.

Since the Jagaran girls were attending school during the week, having a conventional training schedule typically offered by Don Bosco would make it difficult for the girls to attend classes during the week. Hence, Nishtha requested Don Bosco to customize the Spoken English and Computer training to 6 days a month (Saturdays and Sundays) spread over 6 months. Father Tomy and Don Bosco's Training Program Coordinator Ms. Shatabdi Roy pointed out that such an arrangement would be counter to efficient learning by the students when compared to the more rigorous 10 hrs a day, 6-days a week learning schedule that had worked effectively for all other training batches conducted by Don Bosco. However, upon Nishtha's insistence, Don Bosco agreed to the more relaxed training schedule and classes commenced for 40 girls in two batches from September 2014-February 2015. The training program faced many hurdles in the form of low attendance of the girls due to floods, family issues as well inability to understand the accent of the Anglo-Indian English teacher, teacher absences etc. Floods during the months of January-February further caused many girls to miss classes that were then made up in the subsequent months.

Following the completion of the training, Don Bosco attempted to place many of the girls in retail jobs in the outskirts of Kolkata and the suburbs. However, many girls complained of low pay, long commute, long hours as well as inability to perform the job requirements. Asha Atlanta volunteers Padmanava and Arkadeep visited Jagaran in December 2015 and determined that many of the girls who underwent the spoken English and computer training were barely proficient in spoken English and had almost negligible reading capability. Their computer skills were also found to be rudimentary at best. It was very evident that the relaxed training program spread over more than 6-7 months was not very effective in helping the girls learn English or Computer skills due to the long breaks between each training class. This further led

to the girls feeling very awkward and insecure in their jobs causing many girls to quit their jobs. Many girls also expressed their desire to pursue higher studies and possibly work part time.

Preliminary Lessons Learned and Challenges:

1. Spoken English and Computer training program must be conducted as per a rigorous schedule such as 6 days a week for 10-12 hours to ensure that the material is retained by the students.
2. Job placements for girls from remote villages in cities like Kolkata will not work. Since Baruipur is not an urban city, there will not be too many super markets or Café Coffee Days where they can work. Instead, looking for options such as setting up a medical transcription facility or remote accounting facility in Baruipur may be more suitable so the girls can commute from their villages.
3. Insisting on part time work in Baruipur or asking for pay of Rs.10,000 etc. is not realistic. The girls must be counselled to have realistic salary and work expectations.
4. If enough girls can find jobs in close proximity to each other in Kolkata, Asha can offer to pay for lodging of the girls and possibly have an older female from the village supervise the girls in Kolkata. This route can be pursued as a last option if combined with sufficient counselling to the parents of the girls.

Site visit to Hijli Inspiration and Don Bosco by Anu – October 2016

Hijli Inspiration (another Asha Atlanta supported NGO based out of Kolkata) conducts similar Spoken English and Computer Training for children from Kolkata's slums through the support of Smile India Foundation. Inspiration selects students from its centers and also hires teachers to conduct the training while job placements are done through both Smile Foundation and Inspirations connections within Kolkata. Anu met with the Founder/Coordinator of Hijli Inspiration Ms. Chandreeyi Das on October 2016. Since Hijli Inspiration had previously conducted counselling and self-defense workshops with the Jagaran girls and are well-aware of the mind set and nature of the girls and their families. They offered to conduct Spoken English and Computer Training combined with periodic counselling for the Jagaran girls through Asha's support. However, given that Inspiration has no contacts in Baruipur, it remains to be seen if they will be successful in placing the girls in jobs in Baruipur.

Anu also met with Father Tomy of Don Bosco Tech in Liluah and visited their numerous training facilities as well as the students currently enrolled there. Anu had numerous discussions on their family background, training programs they were undergoing and future plans. Many of the boys were from places like Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha. From the various conversations with the students, it became evident that most rural families preferred to send boys to far away places for vocational training while only girls in and around Kolkata were participating in the training offered by Don Bosco at Liluah. Since it was a Saturday, only the boys in the Residential School were available to talk and the quality of their English and computer skills was extremely impressive. For a nominal fee of Rs. 500 per month, many boys were able to undergoing training in AutoCad and other such design software with guaranteed placements in industries

such as Siemens and Tech Mahindra. For many such students, they were the first generation in their family to have studied beyond Class 5.

Site Visit to Nishtha by Padmanava Sen – December 2016

Padmanava Sen planned a site visit to Nishtha in December 2016 to explore in greater detail, the impact of the Spoken English and Computer Training and the aftermath. Listed below are some of the questions that were planned to be addressed after discussions with the Jagaran girls and staff of Nishtha.

Questions for Nishtha:

1. What is the status of vocational training (if any) for the Jagaran girls?
2. How many of the girls who underwent training with Don Bosco are still employed?
3. How many of the girls are pursuing higher education (Bachelors). What is the plan after their education?
4. What is the status of the remaining girls? Are they married or living at home?
5. If Asha is not going to get involved, what is the plan by Nishtha if any for the girls who have passed class 12 and higher?
6. Has Nishtha contacted any corporations/organizations to start a transcription facility or any such center where the girls can come and work for the day from their villages?

Questions for Inspiration

1. If Asha were to pay them to conduct Vocational training for the Jagaran girls, what is their plan for job placement? Will they give us any guarantee or assurance?

Nishtha Visit Summary (Padmanava Sen – padmanava.sen@gmail.com - December 2016)

Snapshot of Visit:

- 11th December:
 - Meeting 30-40 girls of Class 10-12 from neighbouring villages. These girls receive scholarships from Nishtha.
 - Meeting 3 girls who went through the Don Bosco training. One of them worked for 2 months but left after not getting paid. One of them got employed initially but laid off after few months. The other girl did not get a job.
 - Meeting ~50 girls in Dumdama.
- 12th December (first two sessions –another Asha volunteer Arunima Dasgupta joined)
 - Meeting ~30 girls in Class 10-12 beyond Tongtola.
 - Meeting 7 boys and 30 girls in Sarada Center
 - Meeting 5 boys and 20 girls in Manikjor village. Some are even going to colleges.
- 13th December (After first session, Arkadeep Kumar from Asha Atlanta joined)
 - Meeting 25-30 girls in Chandipur village

- Meeting 20-25 girls in Nahati and later, talk to Tanushree (who is working in Baruipur data entry center while studying in college)
- Meeting 15-20 girls in Umarpota village (somehow these girls seem to be more defined about their girls. Nishtha is working in this village for 30 years and that may have changed the mindset of their family)
- Detailed discussions with Minadi regarding future plans
- For the discussions with girls the following activities are followed
 - Meet and greet. The students need to introduce themselves. They had to add few lines about their qualities and vices, what they like and dislike.
 - Discussions about their goals and ambitions in life, the bottlenecks and the solutions they propose to fix the bottlenecks
 - Discussions about safety and social issues
 - Checking their English vocabulary and English sentence construction skills
 - Discussing about their willingness to work after 12th to provide their own tuition
 - Providing situations and asking them to explain what to do (individually). Some examples are – (a) I fell in love with a local boy. He is asking to flee and get married. What to do? (b) I am studying in Class 12. After I turned 18, got a proposal. What should I do? (c) Friend from school is forced into marriage. What to do? (d) I have to travel a distance for work. How should I motivate myself? Etc
 - Cultural break in some sessions via dancing 😊
- Overall impression
 - Even if under Kanyashree scheme from Government, girls are given cycles, in most villages they are not safe after dark or during midday in less frequented roads
 - The English skill overall is poor. Most Class 12 students can not construct a simple sentence without errors.
 - The computer exposure is very limited. Some girls have smart-phones which may have made them better in searching etc.
 - They want to work but travelling to Kolkata is not an option for girls in villages. The roads are not safe after 5-6 pm. Only if there are 3-4 girls from Jagaran group gets nearby with a decent salary of 6K+, they can consider ladies hostel (PG) option.
 - It is very clear that the girls who are with Nishtha, are more confident and can speak more clearly. Some of them have a well thought plan for their lives as well. (study-graduate-work-marry)

Q/A for Nishtha:

1. **What is the status of vocational training (if any) for the Jagaran girls?**

The Don Bosco training has ended.

2. How many of the girls who underwent training with Don Bosco are still employed?

Initially 7 out of 20 girls got employed- 3 in Baruipur center. Then 2 from Baruipur center got laid off after temporary task was over. One of the girl did not get salary so quit. One of the girl working in Kolkata could not travel with 3.5K salary and it was unsafe. Two girls in Kolkata and one girl in Baruipur center are still working. So retention number is THREE.

3. How many of the girls are pursuing higher education (Bachelors). What is the plan after their education?

Most of them are pursuing graduation.

4. What is the status of the remaining girls? Are they married or living at home?

At least 13 out of 20 girls are studying.

5. If Asha is not going to get involved, what is the plan by Nishtha if any for the girls who have passed class 12 and higher?

Giving scholarship is the only option looking at their means.

6. Has Nishtha contacted any corporations/organizations to start a transcription facility or any such center where the girls can come and work for the day from their villages?

I do not think Nishtha is equipped with such resources and contacts technically.

Q/A for Inspiration

1. If Asha were to pay them to conduct Vocational training for the Jagaran girls, what is their plan for job placement? Will they give us any guarantee or assurance?

>> Inspiration is mostly conducting the training successfully with Smile foundation (Spoken English, Computer, Soft skills, retail management). It will be difficult to implement this model in Baruipur as of today.

Detailed Assessment of the girls /training (Padmanava) :

Padmanava visited 200-300 girls (mostly Class 11-12, College 1st yrs) in 9-10 village centers (namely Damdama, Nihata, Manikjor, Tongtala, Chandipur, Umarpota, Jharkhali etc). We have discussed their main educational and social challenges. Created situation and asked about their responses.

It is clear that the girls who are trained longer by Jagaran project are more confident and more prepared for social challenges.

For the Don Bosco training,

What worked -

1. Don Bosco contacts for Job placement (6-7 out of 20 got jobs initially - three of them still have jobs);
2. First exposure to such training in that area for those girls

What did not work -

1. the relaxed module. As already mentioned it should be rigorous training

2. the overall English knowledge, Most girls out of 200 in Class 11/12 do not know proper sentence construction. From that stage it is not possible to go for jobs. < In cities, students go for multiple computer training before joining a job>
3. the mismatch between training and placement (trained for data entry but got call center interviews)
4. Hindi speaking computer teacher whom many girls could not follow
5. Irregularities from both parties.
6. No training material is distributed which is not like other training institutes.

Facts:

Every year around 50-60 Jagaran girls (who get scholarships) appear for 12th exam. 70% pass the exam and around 50% of them continue college > around 20 each year.

First we need to make sure they continue college against the financial challenges.

Option 1: part time work to support their own tuition. (Problem - part time works are rare)

Option 2: Do tuition and other local work (knitting/farming help etc) to pay for their tuition

Option 3: Work full time for a year which will generate enough money for 3 yrs

Option 4: Scholarship for their education (not a scalable model across the Villages). Only chosen few can be supported.

But one of them needs to be chosen to avoid their marriage during studies.

Problems during work:

Since they could not get part-time work (remember they are competing with a huge Kolkata students ready to travel and work late). They have 8 hrs of work + 4-5 hrs of travel. That made the day ending beyond Sunset. Most roads around Village are very unsafe and girls have to take cycles (as Autos become irregular). Two girls travel to Kolkata and they live near the Hotor station. They reach home quite late and due to recent abuse/rape/trafficking incidents, it is causing Tension > parents insisting on getting married as well. Also, the low pay scale made the option to stay in Ladies hostel in Kolkata impossible (4-5K monthly expenditure)

3 Girls who are working now

- Tanya Khatun (Baruipur data entry center - got selected with 2 other girls, after a month fired because of less work availability, again hired from Nov 16. Get paid for entering information from forms. 30 p/Form. 600 forms come to 180 Rs a day. She wants to improve typing speed. Appeared for many interviews -11. Mostly call center interviews which did not help for poor English)
- Payel Ghosh and Shivani Mondal - Working in Mukti world (cinemal hall - ticket and snacks counter). Long hours of work and have to go via Hotor then cycles.

Suggestions from Padmanava

1. We need to be clear about our goals. If our goal is to make sure the girls stay in College. Best option is to provide them a scholarship for studies and give them year-end basic computer and Spoken English training of One month (not Job intended) in Baruipur.
2. Get information if there are centers to give Retail training, soft skill training or desktop publishing. Give that training to selected few who are close to Baruipur and can travel a bit for work (and willing to go extra distance). This can be done for the girls who went through DB training and have experiences with interviews.
3. There is no need to involve any more organizations until our goals are clear as these girls have far more social challenges than city girls.
4. Nishtha can not run any training for spoken english and computer themselves.

Proposed Next Steps for 2017

Following the numerous site visits and discussions, the following steps are proposed as action items:

1. Nishtha will need to hire an English teacher in house to teach the students of all grades (Class 1- Class 12). For the smaller grades, the teacher shall start with basic English (spoken and written) that will augment any material taught in the regular schools. For the higher grades and students who have not had proper foundation, this teacher will provide a bridge course designed to help the older girls gain sufficient foundation in English for job purposes. Asha Atlanta will pay for the salary of this teacher.
2. Only girls from the 2014-2016 Don Bosco provided Spoken English and Vocational Training program who appear to be highly motivated to work will be identified by Nishtha. Such girls will be sent for additional training in Spoken English centers in Baruipur for intensive training. Nishtha will need to identify such a center and ensure that they will guaranteed job placements.
3. Given the past history of Hiji Inspiration in conducting self-defense and counselling programs for the Jagaran girls, additional counselling will be provided to the Jagaran girls on a periodic basis in the form of workshops for both the girls and preferably their families. Asha Atlanta will pay Hiji Inspiration to conduct these workshops. Based on the outcome of these next steps, additional action will be taken.

Pictures from the Visit



Interaction with college girls in Nishtha Center (who went through DB training)



Girls in Damdama with their teachers



Padmanava with the jagaran girls from Damdama



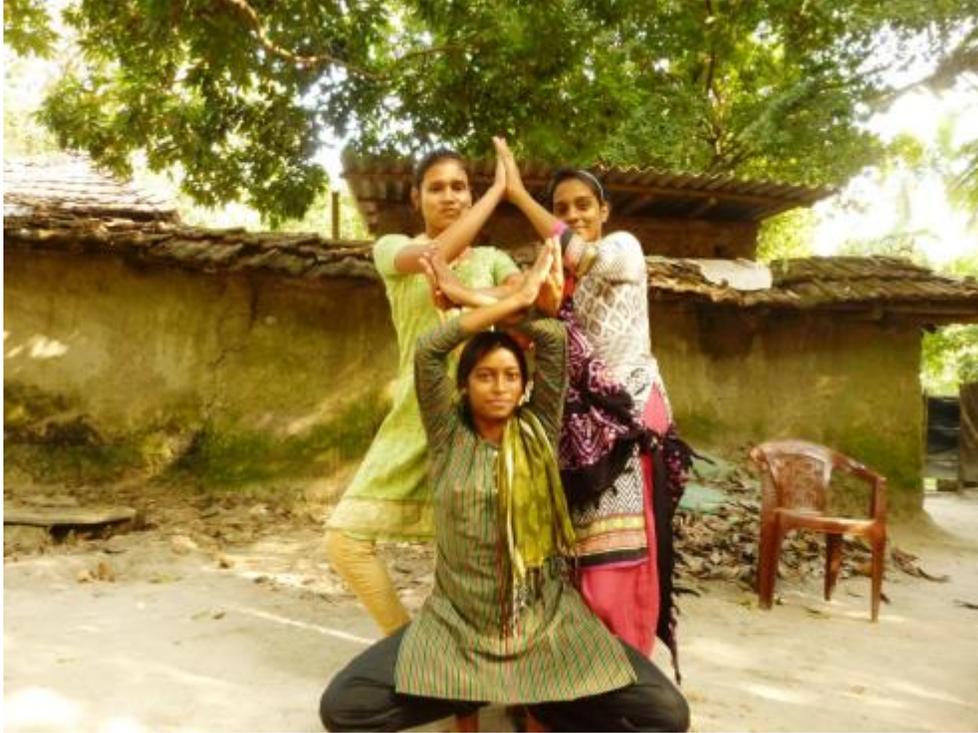
Padmanava and Arunima with Jagaran girls from village near Tongtola



Asha volunteers with Jagaran girls in Sarada Bhavan



Padmanava with Jagaran girls in Chandipur village



Dances in Nahati village



Padmanava and Arkadeep in Nahati village



Crazy photo in Nahati village



Padmanava and Arkadeep in Umapota village



Selfie with Minadi