

Asha Silicon Valley

Sankalp Special School Site Visit

Location: Kanpur, U.P.

Date of Visit: February 15, 2024

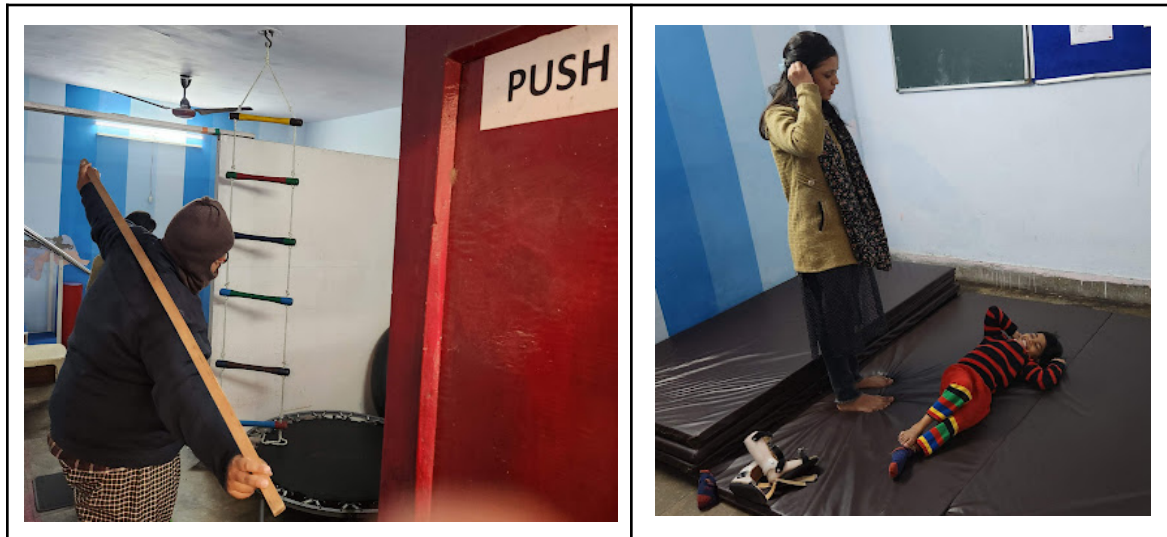
Visit conducted by: Dr. Deepti Tewari

Reported by: Vijay Poduri (vpoduri@yahoo.com)



My visit to Sankalp began at 10:30 AM. The school runs from 10 AM to 2:30 PM, six days a week, from Monday to Saturday. After my arrival and brief introductions, Dr. Deepti gave me a tour of the facility. We first started out with the physiotherapy room. There I saw one older child, a teenager who was working on some stretching exercises by himself. In another section of the room, there was a teacher urging a young child lying on a thick, padded floor mat to do some basic exercises. This immediately highlighted several aspects of the school: children of different

age groups come here, they have very different abilities and needs, and several of them need highly individualized attention.



Next, we stepped into a classroom. A couple of children of different ages were sitting at a table, toying with plastic objects. They were delighted to see us, and reached out to hold our hands. One of the children likes to have his head rubbed by others, and he grabbed my hand to do that. That simple gesture, seeking human contact and basic affection, was very moving. Despite the fact that these kids were not communicating verbally, they managed to convey great fondness for Dr. Deepti and a warm welcome for me.



In a partitioned section of the classroom, a teacher worked with another child on a picture book. This highlighted again the nature of the care provided: several of the children have to receive individual attention for significant periods of time. Dr. Deepti explained that this means that one teacher can work with 5 to 7 children at most.



There are also some children who can be grouped together. This leads to group activities and learning, which also enables the children to learn to interact socially with others.



Later, I visited the vocational training area. Some of the high functioning students are trained in various activities so that they can lead independent lives. The area had a kitchen-like section where students can develop motor skills (through activities like shelling peas) as well as learn basic cooking skills.

After the tour, I sat with Dr. Deepti Tewari and Ms. Alka Mishra and we talked about the school, its day-to-day functioning, its origins, and the challenges faced by it. I realized that it is difficult to scale the services provided by the school easily. There are space constraints in the school, and it is difficult to find and hire trained therapists and educators. In addition, because the needs of the children are so unique, the planning for each child is unique and one teacher can handle only about half a dozen children. Finally, it may also be difficult to ensure high quality of care at a larger scale.

Overall, my impression of the school was that it was spacious, airy, well-lighted, and clean. The staff were dealing with the children with a great deal of love, attention, and care. I really admire their patience and diligence. They are performing a great service.