

Site Visit Report

Agniva Roy

5th February 2023

Background

Hijli Inspiration, in partnership with Asha Atlanta, runs backup coaching centers in the Kamarhati area. This is towards the north of Kolkata. Currently two centers are being run, that provide instruction in Bengali and Urdu. The centers are located in rooms in the slums, which is where the students also live. One of the centers currently runs in a room shared with a local club – there are some issues because of this, and so they are looking to move to a new location which will be closer for the students. I visited both the centers with Uttam Dey and Bablu Manna.

Main goals and discussions about changes:

Hijli used to provide support to students on their school curriculum, for students in classes 5 - 10. They have volunteers who work as tutors on various subjects. However, in the face of long-term school closures, they are changing their program to a more holistic approach, for students in classes 5 - 7 only. Their approach is now to provide more direct education to students to help them keep up with the curriculum, and bridge the gap caused by sustained school closure. They are also planning to introduce digital education. This was discussed and approved by the Asha Atlanta chapter. They hope to keep tabs on students past Class 7 as well informally, and ensure that they qualify their Class 10 examinations. We also discussed trying to collect data on alumni of the program, and involving some of them as volunteer tutors for newer students.

My visit

I visited on a Sunday, so the students were asked to show up on a day that they usually have off. They were happy to be there. Hijli currently accomodates students in classes 5 - 10, but some older students, who are in Classes 11 - 12, or in colleges, were also present. I interacted with a lot of the students – both in the Bengali and Urdu groups. I asked them to read to me in English and in their vernacular, which they were mostly able to. They got a little stuck on some English words, and were also a little shy, but in general were good at communicating. I also asked them questions about mathematics, or geography, and the students were eager to talk about their studies. Their schedule gives them time on Fridays to spend on art or any creative pursuit. They also have access to a few story books. The students showed me various artwork they had created, and some of them also handed me greetings cards, wishing me a happy new year. Their creative work was really good – ranging from paintings, to clay models, to small wooden figurines. Some students had recently received awards in school.

I spoke to the older students about their aspirations. Many of them spoke about wanting to go to college. Some of the girls talked about working in beauty parlors – it is apparently a pretty common and stable profession in the area and having a school degree makes it more accessible. One alumni of the coaching centers is pursuing an undergraduate degree in History. Their teachers, Aasia Khatoon, Samma Parveen, and Md Aziz, were eager to talk about their students and their progress. Aziz is not from the locality but he is loved dearly by the students, and he works hard for them as well.

