Asha Site visit Hijli Inspiration at Kamarhati (Sathi centers)

December 15th 2015
by Asha volunteers Padmanava Sen and Arkadeep Kumar

Summary of visit:

- Visited 2 centers and interacted with students
- Asked students basic questions in Math and basic English
- Talked to teachers about what all they are doing to maintain interest of students, learned about students enjoying making greetings cards as part of their art and craft class.

On 15th Dec, 2015 I traveled from Ultadanga station in Kolkata to the Kamarhati centre. The project partner Uttam da was waiting at the Ultadanga station, on his way back from his office in Salt Lake. On the way we discussed the conditions of the Kamarhati center. The important points were the locality not having environment conducive for children to study, things such as liquor shops around the slums and fights between residents. He also mentioned that some students are studying and working (he mentioned the term child labor). After getting down at train station at Agarpara we had to take auto-rickshaw to reach an intersection near Sagore Dutta hospital. On reaching Kamarhati, we met with Padmanava da and then continued towards the centers.

The first center was having 2 sections – one for Bengali medium students another for Urdu medium students. Most students appeared conversant in hindi/urdu, even if they were studying in Bengali medium schools. There was one teacher for Urdu section probably named Aasia Khatoon, and 2 teachers for the Bengali section named Namita Majumdar and another newly recruited Math teacher Sattar Mallick. Students for almost all classes were present – mostly class 1-8. The student group had more girls than boys, which was a good to see. The teachers informed about 60% girls vs 40% boys. The students were from a number of schools – 2 names came up of Bhabomoyi school and Sarvamongala school. Some of the students go to private school which had fees. Padmanava da and I started interacting with the students and teachers-dividing the students into 2 groups and then exchanging our groups. The teachers explained that the students are now having post-exam break, and new session would start in January. They further mentioned that they taught the students how to make greetings card, and how it was huge success and student like the activity. The students had made cards for new year which they were very eager to show and wish happy new year, since it was mid-December and almost end of the year. It was really welcoming to find them put so much effort for the card. I took images of the cards as put at the end of this report. The teachers also spoke about brother-sister pairs or sibling pairs did better in studies compared to the other students.

I saw Padmanava da start asking questions about what are their favorite subject and to speak what is their name in English. They could say their name, but had some problems in speaking
the line “my favorite subject is _____.”. A number of students said their favorite subject is Math, and then came other options like history, Bengali. I started asking them what they want to be when they grow up, and got a range of answers from being doctors, teachers, policewoman, football players.

Some noticeable things which came up are when both Padmanava da and I started asking questions about Math, very basic algebra to class 5-6 students, they were not able to answer. Assuming they were intimidated to be put in a spot, we told them to work it out in their notebooks. Even after that some faltered, whereas some could do it. We gave a few students something about triangles or types of triangles/angles subtended. The results varied a lot amongst the students. Some students were very bright and quick to answer. I later came to know that the students were lagging in math, hence those temporary teachers were hired starting last year and hopefully the educational gaps in the students will decrease significantly in 1-2 yrs. I spoke to some students studying in class 9 and 10 and told me that they want to continue education beyond to class 11 and 12 and go to college.

Next we came to another center which had all the students in Bengali medium. Here the teachers were Tamali Das, Pritam Banerjee and Rita Hari. We met a teacher (Rita) who I heard to be having long experience at that center, and respected in that community. Uttam da explained these location were club rooms, which the local people have let out for teaching the children. He stressed on the importance of having local support to have any effort being successful. It appeared that the room had more students than it could accommodate with cupboards and other equipment probably belonging to the club.

There was a poster written “Sathi education center, supported by Asha for education” and Padmanava da asked some student to read out what was written. Comparing to the other school, the students here seemed to be a bit better in academic respect. A few of them recited poems which was impressive. The students also sang some songs, and the teachers also joined in with them. One teacher recited his own poem. The teachers requested Uttam da, Padmanava da, and me to join them in singing with them. Some students were giving board exams, and saw their ABTA test papers. We wished them all the best for exams. Overall it was good to see the work done by Inspiration for these children.

I asked the students about their proficiency in computers and came to know they now have computer education in schools where they learn MS Paint, typing and putting names of states on maps. Students also reported to using mobile phones and internet sometimes to find meaning of words. Technology has made in-roads to all sections of the society it seemed. They know what a tablet is and told some of their houses have it, and that they sometimes play games on these mobile devices which belongs to their older brothers or sisters or parents.
Cards made by students at the two centers.

Student with their teacher in the middle
Asha volunteers Arkadeep Kumar (left) and Padmanava Sen with the students

Padmanava da (on left) asking students questions