On 9th January 2018, I have reached the “Group of Friends” club center at Ceagur Street of Kamarhati, Kolkata using the shared auto from Sagardutta Hospital intersection towards Ghat. I was greeted by Mrs Kasturi Mukherjee. It was the second day of the gender sensitivity training in January session. The target student group was the middle group according to age (around 10-14 years).

With the teachers of INSPIRATION, I first visited the two new centers opened last May. I also met the new teachers. The students are in the Class III-VIII range. I asked their names, classes and what subjects they love or hate the most. Most students are new to INSPIRATION and have not seen me in previous visits. I also checked little bit math and English knowledge. There was one Urdu medium center and one Bengali medium centers. Both centers are close by and near the Ceagur Street center. They live in nearby areas.
When I returned, around 14 boys have reached the center for the session. There is one more trainer (Ankita Das) helping Mrs Kasturi Mukherjee and someone from INSPIRATION was making notes during the session. The session followed like this –

- All the kids are given small balls to bounce on the floor. They kept blaming each other. After some time, a circle was made and then two of them at once was called and told to do the same task. The result was the same. They were explained that the blaming game was there for no reason.

- The boys stood in a line of 7 in both sides and they were asked about their name and their favourite hero. They were also asked why that hero was their favourite. (Towards the end, I asked them what qualities made their role model hero famous. I needed to explain that there was hard work involved too.)

- There were made into groups of 3-4 boys and told to draw a good human being & some qualities that defined a good human being. It is very interesting to see the results. One group drew a man and a woman. One group did not draw face. One group drew a man and one group made a small picture. The qualities they defined were mostly about keeping roads clean and being honest in dealings with others.

- After this we just asked what good qualities they think they have. Most mentioned like keeping houses clean or helping others if someone falls on road or not to take others money or some subjects they are good at.

Boys during the drawing sessions
Drawings by the groups

Participation by the boys
After the boys’ session, girls’ session started. There were 32 girls present. Mrs Mukherjee and I were discussing otherwise lack of exposure of these kids beyond academics. Some of them were never asked what they like or what they want to become. The session followed like this –

- Girls were told to close their eyes, control their breathing and imagine balloons.
- Then each line of 6-7 girls needed to coordinate among themselves to play game of ballons. Once they hear a clap, they have to bounce the ballons without using hand. Nobody listened to the clap during games. Some girls also tried to switch their teams and got caught.
- Then quick discussions started about love mentioned by one of them. It was used a platform to let them talk. Everyone mentioned love in context of parents and brothers/sisters. Some mentioned friends.
- We had a chat what they think about their own strength or weakness. Similar answers like what subjects they are good at. Mrs Mukherjee made sure everyone joined this discussion and the solutions of their weakness come from their own mind.

Participation by the girls
Sessions with closed eyes

I also met Soma Das (Majumdar). She conducts creative workshop through performing arts and games. Later on, I talked to Kasturi Mukherjee about the possibility of training people in Asha Rajatalab so that such training can be organized for boys there.

After these sessions, I talked to Mr Uttam Dey about ways to reduce the noises in this center. We also talked about the Nanda foundation centers in some of the areas they are working. Then I sat with the INSPIRATION teachers and we had a discussion about the current status of the centers. I asked each teacher what were the main difficulties faced by students and how they were trying to solve them. The summary is given below –

- Teachers present (years of their involvement) – Sattar Mallick (~3 years), Nadeem Ansari (8 months), Gobinda Mukherjee (8 months), Rita Hari (~8 years), Aasia Khatoon (~12 years), Tamali Das (~9 years), Sarmistha Majumdar (8 months).

- Problems and suggestions
  - Home-works given by schools (lack of parents’ supervision, shown in the center). Continuous practice of equations.
  - Very slow in reading English texts. Need good supervision and help. (In one center mentioned the smaller size of Black board)
  - English grammar base is poor. Hesitation to read English even at higher classes. They are continuously motivated and new words are written separately.
- Some issue about Urdu medium students in math class specially in Arithmetic.
- The teachers give regular assignments to other classes while teaching one group. That is how the students from different classes are managed. Friday, some painting classes and story book reading classes happen. Some books developed by INSPIRATION are taught too.
- Some of the students of centers are studying in college. Most students do not drop out before 12th. INSPIRATION tracks students. One student did not qualify for 12th and took training
- In Govt schools, the students are given suggestions about the questions that will come in exams. That is a big deterrent of learning. Next year onwards, pass/fail system will start from Class 8 and it may change some mentality among students.