

Doorstep Schools (DSS) - Site Visit Report - April 4, 2019

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Summary:

I visited two schools run by DSS in south east corner of Pune city in a **Hadapsar - Handewadi** area.

1. Green City Construction site

The center is run in a tin cabin. It would be getting incredibly hot in the summer months; it has a Balwadi (Kindergarten) and a classroom. Altogether, there were about 50 kids. There were a dedicated teacher managing each section. As you can see in the adjoining pictures, the classroom had adequate teaching materials. The students were expecting us. They greeted us as a group and introduced themselves. Most kids were bilingual as their parents hailed from Hindi or Kannad speaking parts of the country and medium of education in the schools in Marathi which is the local language. In spite of the linguistic challenges, the kids had remarkable confidence. They had a "Sea creatures" week going on, As you can see in the pictures, the kids were working on different projects related to the subject. They had done skethces, paintings, models - it was impressive. Couple of kids also made a presentation on what they had built. I could see a lot value built by the teachers. I was especially impressed by a young girl in Balwadi, probably 4 years old, who was attending to her younger sister and at the same time, was the smartest person in the room. She could read and write fluently and at the same time had the courtesy to wait for others to test their knowledge before she would correctly answer the question. I am still deliberating on sponsoring her complete education - she deserves a sponsor.

2. ARV Royale Construction site

This place has slightly better facility. It's run in the basement of a partially constructed building. It is much cooler. The place has a creche and a study center. It was staffed by two teachers cum attendants. The system is similar to Green city. Even in this location, I met a really bright student - Sanju, whose parents come from Jharkhand, he can name things in Hindi as well as Marathi, he is a fearless speaker, loves to eat fish and has uncontrollable energy - they call it ADHD in developed world. They had some really impressive teaching aids - you can check them out in the pictures on the right. Sanju definitely needs someone to sponsor his education - in a better facility. He is hungry for knowledge and he can apply what he has learnt.

As you can see, both schools are run at constructions sites. The builder has provided space and basic facilities like electricity and water. One school is run in a tin shade while the other is run in the parking structure at

Pictures speak louder - than words



the ground level of a building under construction. Both facilities have two sections - a mixed grade classroom for kids who are attending grades 1st through 4th and a kindergarten aka day care center for younger kids, who are in many cases, younger siblings of the students.

The parents work at construction sites and send their kids to DSS because they are running a facility next door. It's a minimalist yet an effective set up. Some kids attend Pune Corporation Schools while many others depend on DSS centers. DSS partners with the education department and municipal schools so that students can take their grade examinations. DSS runs about 70 such centers at different construction sites in and around Pune City. They also run another 15 facilities in slums and low income areas of the city. The schools are organized in clusters and each cluster has a coordinator.

In both the facilities:

1. Most kids could recognize alphabets, read, write,
2. Most 1st-4th grade students could do additions and subtractions.
3. Higher grade student could do multiplications
4. Few kids recited tables
5. There were kids who were not afraid of getting on the stage and speaking.

All in all, it was a wonderful and rewarding experience. My aunt accompanied me for the visit. She lives in Pune and was truly inspired looking at the work done by DSS.

DSS also has similar facilities in Mumbai - that is where the organization has its origins. It was formed in in early 1990s in Mumbai.

Poorva Sahastrabuddhe who gave me a tour of the facility, is enrolled at USC studying Social Work. She is a full time employee of DSS and she was fantastic. She organized the tour of the facility and towards the end of the day, she drove us to DSS office. We met the founder, **Mrs Paranjape** and **Ms Bhavan Kulkarni**, who left her rewarding career in IT and is now volunteering full time for DSS. I congratulated them on winning the grant from nVidia and we spoke about how they plan to utilize the money. We discussed a novel idea of creating awareness and making all responsible members of the society take ownership of bringing every kid, who does not have access to education, to DSS and similar facilities. This is a drive to create social awareness whereby it's not just the teachers and social workers and organizations like DSS that assume ownership of ensuring that kids go to school - it's everyone who needs to realize the criticality and impact of making sure that kids get educated, they learn to fish.

It was day that gave us a truly rewarding and inspiring experience. You could be in the heart of a metropolis but there are people who are disadvantaged and you can make a difference.

