

Diksha KHEL Center Site Visit Report

Asha Volunteers Present:

Sameer, Pramith

Diksha Team Present:

Tanya, Gautam, students (approximately 20 students were present), teachers (Akhilesh Singh, Amrinder, Maya, Sangita)

Time and Venue: 8:30 AM EST, 6:00 PM IST, Zoom Virtual Visit, Sept 16th 2022

Goals:

- 1) Interacting with the students and teachers by asking them about what their needs, dislikes, needs, and comforts are.
- 2) Build a rapport with the students by not only asking questions, but answering as many of their questions as we can.

About Diksha KHEL Center:

Diksha Foundation, founded in 2010, offers holistic education to children and youth from socially and economically marginalized communities in the state of Bihar. It is primarily based in the city of Patna with one center in Patna and another in Hilsa. They do community outreach programs where they educate the children and youth about a variety of subjects such as inclusivity, civic responsibilities, rights, etc. This education is supplementary to formal school. Asha Purdue started supporting Diksha's KHEL (Knowledge Hub for Education and Learning) project in 2012 and has disbursed over \$100K over the years. There have been 6 site visits and one virtual site visit so far. Review calls are held with the project partner, Diksha team and Purdue volunteers twice a year before initiating a disbursement.

About KHEL:

KHEL is an after school supplementary program with an objective to provide holistic education to children. They particularly work with marginalized communities belonging to scheduled castes and resource-poor communities. They have 144 students enrolled at the Patna center across all programs, which Asha Purdue funds. Some of their regular activities include:

- Supplementary English, Hindi and Math classes
- Arts and Crafts "Kabaad se Jugaad"
- Matrix Mela (Activities around mathematics)
- Computer Training
- Bal Sansad (Children's Parliament)
- Open House Meeting (Students participating in center activities and discussing issues)
- "My Life, Mere Faisley" (Youth programme that teaches them about social issues and how they can deal with them in their personal life)

About the Virtual Site Visit:

The call was arranged at a time with Diksha KHEL Center so that the students will be present in the center (around 6PM IST). The students were distributed in groups of 9-10 in various parts of the KHEL center where they each had a phone or laptop screen joined to the call. The call started with Purdue Asha trying to talk to individual students and asking about their perspectives. However, quickly, the inquisitive nature of the students took over and the call was flooded with numerous questions from the Diksha students. In between, different students were still individually asked about their challenges, difficulties, what they like or dislike, and what their hobbies were. The interaction had to be finished, however, as many of the student's parents had started calling and enquiring about when they would be able to return. After that, each present teacher was introduced and asked about their jobs, challenges, and their responsibilities. They shared their motivations and concerns. The students at KHEL center are split into three groups based on their knowledge level – Group A, Group B, Group C. Students from all groups were present during the site visit.

Student Interaction:

The meeting started with an open invitation for the students to step forward and for me to ask some questions to them. It was also made clear that if they had any questions, they should be free to ask them. The students asked questions such as – how you got to study in the US, a request to see the sunlight (as it was night in India, and they were curious to see the sunlight and timezone difference), how did you join Asha, etc...

Shubhankar Raj – He is age 12, in Group B, and loves doing yoga, playing, and studying in KHEL center. He also likes singing and rapping. He rapped the song Pagla Pagli 2 later in the call.

Chandani Kumari, Nitesh, and others – Showed various art projects, such as a painting on a soup, a colorful wreath, and a small realistic bouquet made from artificial decorative flowers.

Priyanka (was asked how she handled COVID) – had a lot of problems, as they couldn't go to school and come to the KHEL center. But volunteers from Asha kept delivering classes using online methods and students that had internet or cellular services were able to benefit from the help. Priyanka also later sang the song Baikhoff.

Subodh – Subodh was one of the participants in the English learning and cultural programs with the US embassy. He enjoyed the course where he learned about the American culture and was able to improve and practice his English. He couldn't speak much English before but now he can at least speak and understand some English.

When asked about the things that they dislike within Diksha KHEL, most students said they were mostly satisfied but had 2 complaints – one when the teachers discipline them via scolding them, as they also get scolded on in their government school and when they come to Diksha, they are not expecting scolding. Their second complaint was that the current Diksha location does not have a big playground for them to freely play without any issues from neighbors or pedestrians/vehicular traffic passing through the streets. This complaint was also later echoed by the teachers and the managerial staff and that they're looking for solutions by partnering with nearby government schools that have a playground to give afterhours access to the students.

Teachers Interaction (4 full time staff):

Akhilesh Singh – He is a computer teacher, joined June 2021, before worked in other sectors. When he joined, there was the second wave of COVID going through India and the situation was quite bad. His important task was to try to teach the kids via online education during COVID lockdown, but they struggled quite a bit due to accessibility issues – such as internet, laptops, etc... He believes heavily in giving the students a free and safe space where the students have freedom to express themselves and learn.

Amrinder – Joined 2017, he is a math teacher for the KHEL center. He has experience working with the students and likes teaching them. His biggest challenge is to come up with different teaching methods for the students in the different learning groups of A, B, and C. When asked about the quality of the schools that the students go to, he mentioned that the government schools are of very poor quality. There are case stories of certain courses where the students are just sitting and the teachers are absent.

Maya – previous student at Diksha KHEL center and now is a part-time teacher and teaches English to the younger students. She also takes dancing classes and is also pursuing a Masters in Sociology. Since she was a former student, she has an easier time connecting with the students but a hard time trying to give directives to the students.

Sangita – joined Diksha 12 years ago, teaches Hindi and takes music classes. Says that the biggest regret is not able to give more time to the students as they have to go to regular school, take the bus, have family related work, and also have to go home.

Staff Interaction:

The biggest concern is regarding the sale of the building. The current owners give a subsidized rent rate and the concern is there if the new owner will follow through. Furthermore, they also mentioned that the lack of a playground is a big problem. Lastly, some of the staff echoed concerns that they need a full-time English teacher, instead of the part time teacher. Between the managerial staff, there are different opinions regarding what is the best solution – whether to hire a full-time English teacher for advanced English or not.

General Impressions:

The largest impression left from the virtual site visit is that of the confidence readily apparent within every single Diksha KHEL student. The staff and teachers have managed to foster a good culture where the kids are provided with guidance, independence, freedom, and responsibility. This is prevalent within the community, as they have elected leaders (Bal Sansad), artistic expression (by having arts and crafts activities, celebrating festivals organized mostly by the students, teaching dance and music, etc.), and intellectual curiosity. The teachers seem to have a deep bond with the students and have a genuine interest in their success and wellbeing. This was seen with their concerns also regarding the availability of a playground for the students. The staff also seems to have a good sense for the needs of the students and have been pushing computer literacy and online curriculum to prepare the students for the 21st century.