

Diksha Virtual Visit Report

Organization: Diksha Foundation (<https://dikshafoundation.org/>)
(<https://www.facebook.com/dikshafoundation>)

Project: KHEL (Knowledge Hubs for Education and Learning)
(<https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=1138>)

Type of project: Non-formal Educational Centers

Supporting Chapter: Purdue (<https://purdue.ashanet.org/>)

Type of visit: Virtual via Google Meet

Date: September 6th, 2020

Time: 8:30 AM EST, 6 PM IST, 2 hours

Goals:

1. To interact with the students, teachers and project staff and understand their individual role and experiences
2. To understand the current status of activities and how they are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown

Asha members attending the meeting:

1. Rachana Agrawal - volunteer and steward of Diksha (rachna.agrawal.04@gmail.com)
2. Kshitij Srivastava - volunteer
3. Kushagra Singh - volunteer
4. Trevor Bonjour - volunteer
5. Roopashi Saxena - volunteer
6. Rohil Jain - volunteer
7. Aishwarya Ramanujam - volunteer
8. Adarsh Barik - volunteer
9. Priyankar Bhattacharjee - volunteer
10. Malathi Raghavan - Professor at Purdue

Diksha members organizing the meeting:

1. Gautam Gauri - Founder/Executive Director (gautamgauri@dikshafoundation.org)
2. Shibasis Sahu - Coordinator - Bihar Youth Collective Project
(shibasis.sahu@dikshafoundation.org)

About Diksha:

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 project in 2012 and has disbursed over \$90K over the years. There have been 6 site visits 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)

The Virtual Visit:

Teachers, staff and students joined in on the meeting with Asha volunteers. Some of them had gathered at the center, others from their home. The virtual visit started with an informal introduction from students, staff and teachers. They expressed their interests and things they are currently learning.

Since the lockdown, they have not been able to hold classes at the center. Some students who have smartphones attend the classes online. Many students don't have access to smartphones and the internet. They all try to help each other out by gathering in small groups with at least one person who has a smartphone and study together. Diksha's team of teachers, project staff and volunteers have been in touch with the students since the lockdown began. Out of the 144 students, they are able to physically visit around 90 students regularly. They are in touch with another 10-20 students over the phone. The rest of 30-40 students are out of touch. They have either migrated back to their villages or relocated to some other place within the city in search of jobs. As a result, the children have dropped out of their schools. It is not known if they have enrolled in a different school. Hopefully they will be enrolling in their local school.

Almost all of the parents of the children have lost their jobs during the lockdown. All of them are facing food insecurity as a result. Diksha started the "Annapurna Campaign", raised funds through online crowdfunding and distributed ration kits to the families of all the students. Although these kits run out after 15-20 days. They shared the relief expressed by the parents upon receiving Diksha's help.

There are some problems with getting female students enrolled in colleges due to lack of parental motivation. Diksha members are talking to the parents about it.

Interacting with the students:

We talked with every student that was present. They all talked about which class they studied in and what activities they do at Diksha. Some of the conversation with each student is summarized below:

- Dharamveer is currently pursuing Bachelor's Degree in Art and has been a student at Diksha since the beginning. Now he is an active volunteer in its activities, particularly the Patna Smart City project. In this project they are helping local workers and people of slum areas by making them aware of being responsible citizens, to give feedback to the state government so as to improve the lives of each and every community of Bihar. During the initial few months of lockdown, he participated in creating awareness about the pandemic, health and hygiene practices, safety etc. Through Diksha, he has represented Bihar in various workshops for youth capacity building in Delhi and Ranchi.
- Priyanka is currently in her first year of college. She is enrolled in Diksha's computer training program. She is appearing for Bihar Police examination which consists of various physicals followed by an interview. She talked about her training and her ambition to run a kilometer in less than 4 minutes.
- Sanoj Kumar is currently pursuing a BA degree. He was awarded the President award for his novel invention in making an automated door-lock system in a car, to prevent casualties from a car accident. He was inspired by one accident that happened in Mumbai, in which a family member died of car accident due to a short circuit and they were not able to come out at the end moment, as at that time, there was no automated door-lock system, which can open automatically for emergency purposes. He is also pursuing honors in geography.
- Other students from 9th grade to 12th grade are volunteering to help the younger children study. They gather in small groups at either someone's house or outside to study together.
- All the students were talking with confidence and were asking us questions too.

Interacting with the teachers and project staff:

- Sangeeta (Didi) teaches Hindi and Music at the center. She travels daily via auto rickshaw or bus to the community to teach the students. Since the lockdown started, she and the others have been constantly working on what more they can do for the kids so they can keep learning. They pulled in some money to help the children, distributed food and also stationary. She has been with Diksha for 10 years now and finds joy in working with the children.
- Tanya is the project coordinator for Project ALIVE. She works on creating an inclusive space for the children as well as teachers. They hold workshops with teachers to talk about how to create such space. They make sure that every kid is active at the center and if someone does not talk they try to work with the kids so they become more comfortable.

Currently they are facing problems with fundraising through other sources. They had to close the Hilsa center due to loss of CSR funding. They are looking for funding to re-open it. Patna center is mostly supported by Asha funding. Everyone at Patna is getting their salary on time.

General impression:

- The students were all quite confident when interacting. A lot of them expressed that they really liked it at Diksha because they found it a safe space and had freedom there to explore.
- The teachers seemed to be dedicated to the work they are doing and connected to the children.
- Diksha members are making efforts towards reaching out and continuing the education of children through the means of online learning and small groups and volunteers.

From the volunteers:

- Roopashi - *There is all round development of students and students seem to enjoy the sports activities. Students are also gaining teaching experience which is helpful for their own understanding and benefits the junior students. Teachers are highly motivated and connect with each student at a personal level. Students and teachers are working together to pass through these unprecedented times.*
- Aishwarya - *I was impressed by how inquisitive and talented the kids were. All of them were so excited to meet all of us and know about our lives. To see our efforts reap into such beautiful minds made my day.*
- Rohil - *The students seemed to be really appreciative of the teachers helping them through these difficult times. We could see the efforts that teachers were putting in to teach students in this situation.*

For further information:

Video clips of the meeting:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IGLSQn9mOL-IJ1zI0S7bkYj7NenHrXEv?usp=sharing>

Project Proposal 2020-21:

[https://ashadocserver.s3.amazonaws.com/1138_Diksha_KHELCENTERPROPOSAL2020-21_ASHA\(1\).pdf](https://ashadocserver.s3.amazonaws.com/1138_Diksha_KHELCENTERPROPOSAL2020-21_ASHA(1).pdf)

Annapurna Campaign - COVID-19 Food Relief proposal:

https://ashadocserver.s3.amazonaws.com/1138_DikshaCOVID19Response_AnnapurnaCampaign.pdf