## Asha for Education,

**Site visit Report**

Project : Team VNC, Hyderabad

For: Asha for Education, Purdue University chapter

Date of visit: Aug/20/2012

By: Ashok Naidu (SV volunteer)

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Purpose/Nature of visit: The site visit was conducted for the Purdue University chapter, to assess strategic and operational performance of the program proposed by Team VNC.

Executive Summary:
The site visit conducted during a weekend.

Team VNC provides a supplemental educational program to enable first generation learners from grade 1 to higher education succeed. Their target population is a slum at the Masab Tank area in Hyderabad with plans of expanding to other slums in the future. The operation is based on a Mentor Mentee framework wherein volunteers are paired up with kids who need support. The teaching is conducted in a single room within the slum which is a pukka structure with electricity, lights & water. Team VNC plans to tie up with colleges to recruit new volunteers who would help build a cadre of Mentors in the long run.

Team VNC comprises of working professionals who volunteer their services towards helping disadvantaged youth succeed in their educational goals. This prevents the inter-generational poverty and lack of opportunity due to skill gaps which are accelerated due to lack of resources and education.

There is no such program that provides a similar educational support structure in the vicinity such as VNC. The Management officers including the folks I met are credible.

 While VNC is run by a highly motivated team, the management and volunteers at VNC lack formal experience in teaching, program management or experience creating a sustainable program that would enable them to longitudinally track the progress of the target population & thereby refine their approach/ tools/ methods over time.

I recommend funding to the VNC project under specific conditions laid out subsequently in the report.

## Description of the visit:

I was in Hyderabad during the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr. It being a holidy in India, I visited Team VNC at their project site within the slum & the location where they provide educational services to the children.

The visit was planned and the Management at VNC were accommodative to some vagaries in my scheduling. The location was a well organized “basti”/slum within Hyderabad with pukka structures forming houses within it. The way into the service room was a pathway between the homes which was about 3 feet wide. The community room was about 15x15 feet in dimensions with a blackboard, chalk & a cupboard for supplies. The room was clean and had electricity thereby providing a welcoming environment to children.

I spoke at length to VNC volunteers & some of the adult learners (grade 10 and above). There were smaller kids who were present too and seemed to like to be there which was a testament to the trust that VNC had built over time within the community.

The team of volunteers are a committed team of folks who are primarily Engineering professionals within Hyderabad, in their mid-late twenties. They created, sustained and have been running VNC with their own financial resources over the past three years. The key accomplishment being : The creation of trust within the community. This single achievement shall be an asset that would enable VNC to sustain, grow & establish itself in the long run.

My conversation spanned administrative policies, management, control, lesson planning, course selection, remedial/ intervention planning, human resources, transition management, legal issues, funding, campaign management, marketing and growth management.

VNC has a low operational cost so far which helps them plan for building organizational capabilities. The budget breakdown below shows the Field trip/ Other expenses as the largest quanta – which includes the organizational resource building to train volunteers.

## Concerns facing VNC :

1. Team VNC currently does not have a formal methodology of training its volunteers. This is normal for new NGO’s and shows the ability/ flexibility of team VNC to provide services to the target population while slowly building up their own organizational capabilities. As team VNC grows, they would not be able to wing it as in the past, which makes training & resource management critical.
2. Team VNC has chosen a very large surface area to target. Their students range from grade 1 to college level students. While this was done to address the needs of the community; Team VNC will be stretched thin. Team VNC would need to narrow down their target population or run the risk of the program dilution.
3. Team VNC does not currently have a transition program in the event their core volunteers or Management decide to leave. This leaves VNC in a precarious position with the target community affected due to VNC’s change of Management. Team VNC needs to put together a transition plan & train a second line of leadership to take over.
4. Team VNC is sponsoring students for higher education, which is a high expense commitment. Even as it builds the community and enables the elder students within the community take up professional courses; it leaves VNC with a higher level of risk/ operational costs. Secondly, as more students graduate over time – VNC would create a problem for themselves by sponsoring students for higher education as they would be unable to sponser all the current students in smaller grades.
5. Team VNC’s core team is well educated & well knit. However, they do not have legal resources to enable them handle emergencies that could flare up in sensitive areas. It would help to create an organizational code of ethics including principles of operation, intake & exit.
6. Team VNC has been self funded so far & hence does “not” have FCRA clearance. They would need to get it to avail of funding from foreign organizations such as Asha for Education.

## Recommendations & Observations:

1. Team VNC is a credible organization with professionals who are deeply committed to its cause. The volunteers and office bearers are well educated and are professionals conducting VNC tasks as volunteers.
2. Team VNC does not currently have any external sources of funding. VNC must therefore find local partners and funding sources to enable it to sustain in the long term.
3. Team VNC, while running a parallel machinery – due to existence of Government schools in its vicinity - **needs to exist,** since it provides much needed value to the community. The need definitely must be met & VNC has built credibility over the past three years serving the target population.
4. VNC currently provides a single shift of classes on Sundays. In the event there is increased demand for its services, it could potentially have the supplemental trainings on Saturdays too - enhancing its presence in the community and possibly showcasing itself as an Operational model of efficiency. I do not support expanding to a larger facility so early in its growth.
5. VNC is in need of Laboratory equipment and children centric books that would excite the children, thereby developing their reading abilities. AfE could suggest partner agencies in India who could donate some equipment/ books to VNC.
6. VNC, while being a NGO and a formal organizational structure – does not have second tier of Management leadership. AfE needs to encourage VNC to build a second tier of leadership and build their bench strength.
7. AfE needs to have a successful Exit strategy within 3 years, enabling VNC to stand on its own.
8. VNC is early in its growth. I therefore do NOT recommend supporting additional infrastructure building/ renting costs towards additional class rooms.
9. I do NOT recommend the “contingency” expenditure proposed by VNC – as they need to have some financial commitment by themselves into the endeavor too.