

Site visit report - Asha for Education, Seattle Chapter

Project Name: Society for Health and Educational Development (SHED)

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Project Webpage: <https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=1214>

Name of Site Visitor: Nabanita Majumdar

Affiliation of Site Visitor: Project Steward

Date(s) of Site Visit: Dec 23rd, 2025

Checklist from SHED

(Ask: Please check the following that you were able to ascertain during the site visit)

A. Operations

- What does a typical day look like for the children in school and hostel? What about weekends?

[Response] Hostellers follow a structured day with three meals plus four tea/snack breaks. Mornings are class hours, followed by lunch and rest, then vocational/skill activities (handicrafts, music, gardening in the mini nursery) and indoor games. Day scholars join during school hours. Weekends and school breaks include dance, songs, indoor games, and pleasure trips. The visit on Dec 23 (winter break) showed a relaxed but well-organized hostel routine.

- General well-being of the children - do they look happy there in the school ?

[Response] Children appeared visibly happy, comfortable, and well-cared-for. Strong rapport observed between students and caretakers/teachers. Recent activities include attending the Air Force Christmas Party as invited guests (Dec 2025) and representing SHED in competitions at the Govt. of Assam Social Welfare Dept.'s World Disability Day event (Dec 3, 2025).

- Quality and nutritional value of food being served in the hostels.

[Response] Hostellers receive breakfast, lunch, dinner and four tea/snack breaks daily, freshly cooked on premises.

- Is the learning and progress of the students on par with expected level?

[Response] Students (intellectual disabilities, autism, hearing impairment) are assessed and taught individually against personalized goals rather than uniform grade benchmarks. Don Bosco University Psychology interns (5-6 in 3-month cycles) and Social Work students support assessment and individualized programming.

- For special needs, customized plans for each student?

[Response] Yes. SHED has 4 special educators — 2 specialized in mental retardation/autism and 2 speech therapists for the hearing-impaired — plus a part-time music teacher and visiting doctor. Care and education plans are individualized.

- Girls - boys ratio, hostel facilities, wardens, safety?

[Response] 25 hostellers: 15 boys + 10 girls. Girls' hostellers grew from 6 (Dec 2024) → 10 (April 2026) after the new girls' hostel; plan to add 4 more by early 2027 to reach full capacity (14). Day scholars: 15 (11 boys, 4 girls). Recent infra: 2 boys' bathrooms renovated (INR 1.5 lakh, Wahid Saleh's son, Netherlands); new boys'-hostel septic tank (INR 96,000, Wakif Isfaque, Belgium). Separate wardens/caregivers for each hostel; safety and supervision adequate.

- What do the children who graduate from the project do?

[Response] Students transition to regular government school or are able to join their family business back home.

- Staff and Teachers - do they think it is a great place to work?

[Response] 11 Asha-funded staff + 3 locally funded staff. Long tenures observed; team is committed and enthusiastic. Teachers attend annual govt-led special-education workshops in Guwahati; caregivers receive annual training in Guwahati. SHED covers medicines for non-paying hostellers and for staff as needed.

- Is the student list accurate on the field vs. what has been shared?

[Response] Yes — student list (40 total: 25 hostellers + 43 day scholars) Hostellers matched what was observed and verified via attendance records. Among day scholars some are regular and some cannot come regularly due to transportation constraints.

- Is the teacher and support staff list accurate on the field vs. what has been shared?

[Response] Yes — 11 Asha-funded + 3 local-funded staff list verified against the people met on site.

- Is attendance being taken for both students and teachers/ support staff?

[Response] Yes — daily attendance is maintained for both students and staff in registers.

- Dropout rate of students?

[Response] Low. Hostellers: boys -2 over the cycle (2 dropouts), girls grew from 6 to 10. No financial drop-outs.

- How do they recruit the teachers and support staff?

[Response] Through local networks, references, and the special-education / social-work ecosystem in Guwahati. Don Bosco University's intern pipeline (Psychology + Social Work) is a key feeder. A new assistant teacher (B.Com) was added recently.

- Is there a nearby school or project working on a similar focus area?

[Response] No comparable projects exist in the region. SHED is the only integrated residential school for differently abled children in Sonapur (Kamrup district).

- Do they deny access to education for a student from an underprivileged background?

[Response] No. 10 of 25 hostellers pay no fees; 9 pay only INR 2,000-4,000/mo; only 6 pay the full INR 8,000/mo. Recent free admission: Neima Begum (6 yrs, Nagaon, hearing-impaired). Ajmul and Shubham (orphan siblings, ~6 months ago) also admitted. SOS sponsorships for select students (Payal Kataki, Fatima Begum).

B. Financials

- Is the project partner maintaining a good record of all transactions?

[Response] Yes. Audit reports for FY24-25 (foreign and local funds) and a funds-utilization report for the FY24-25 cycle are provided by SHED's Auditor. FCRA Certificate (020780146) is valid till 30 September 2028.

- Is the project partner doing cashless transactions?

[Response] Largely cashless — salaries and most vendor payments are via bank transfer. Petty cash used only for small local purchases.

- Are the salary payments being made on time?

[Response] Yes — salaries paid on time every month.

- Are the salaries in line with the budget line-items?

[Response] Yes. 2025-26 actual: INR 8,94,000 (Asha) + INR 1,20,000 (local) = INR 10,14,000/yr (INR 84,500/mo across 11 staff). 2026-27 request: INR 10,38,000/yr (INR 86,500/mo) — a modest ~2.4% increase, well below the typical 10% increment, with raises focused on the lowest-paid caregiver and the caregiver-cum-cook.

- Does the project partner have accounting software or is it vouchers and handwritten ?

[Response] A combination of digital records (spreadsheets) for routine tracking, plus physical vouchers and ledgers. Audit is performed annually by a Registered Chartered accountant.

- Any new programs being added?

[Response] (i) Continued vocational training expansion (handicrafts, computer ed, physiotherapy access). Recent community engagement: World Disability Day exhibition (Dec 3, 2025, Govt. of Assam Social Welfare Dept.), Air Force Family Welfare program (Dec 2025), Dalmia Cement Foundation (Nov 2025), Don Bosco pre-Diwali stall (Oct 2025), Rotary Club monthly food donations, Pragjyotishpur University internships and Gauhati University field trips, RBI Guwahati 5-desktop donation, washing machine from Mr. Kuntil Boruah. Increasing no of girl students.

- Any new hiring needs?

[Response] Two roles flagged: (1) one additional special-education teacher, (2) a dedicated vocational-training instructor. Funding-dependent. One new B.Com assistant teacher was added recently.

- Attrition rate of support staff and teachers?

[Response] Low — most staff have been with SHED for multiple years. No major turnover during the last cycle.

- Sources of funding ?

[Response] Foreign funds: Asha Seattle (INR 8,94,000/yr, since 2014, teacher and staff salaries); AFNA (INR 2-2.5 lakh/yr, 10 yrs); Wahid Saleh & family, Netherlands (INR 1-2 lakh/yr, 10 yrs); Wakif Isfaque, Belgium (~INR 0.5 lakh/yr, 3 yrs). Local funds: hostel fees (INR 8-9 lakh/yr from 15 of 25 hostellers); Govt. of Assam (Directorate of Social Justice & Empowerment, ~INR 1-2 lakh/yr, 2 yrs); local well-wishers and flower sale (~INR 40-45,000). In-kind: Rotary Club Guwahati (monthly food), Air Force Family Welfare Association (kitchen items, furniture, clothes), Dalmia Cement Foundation (clothes), Reserve Bank of India Guwahati (5 desktops), Mr. Kuntil Boruah (washing machine, music system), Don Bosco University (handicrafts retail platform). One-time: Asha INR 3,00,000 for girls' hostel; Mr Saleh INR 55,200 for the visitor center.

- Is the project partner charging fees for beneficiaries?

[Response] Optional/tiered. Of 25 hostellers: 6 pay INR 8,000/mo (full), 9 pay INR 2,000-4,000/mo, 10 pay nothing. Day scholars are not charged. Total fee receipts ~INR 8 lakh/yr (~35% of expenses).

- Is the fee nominal and in-line with the region?

[Response] Yes — even the highest tier (INR 8,000/mo) covers only a fraction of the per-child residential cost (boarding + medical + utilities + salaries). The tiered structure is well below regional private-school rates.

- Do they have dropouts because of a student not being able to afford the tuition?

[Response] No — 10 hostellers pay nothing and 9 pay reduced fees. No fee-related drop-outs reported.

C. Surveys

- Please check with a few students on the project

[Response] Spoke with several resident students during the visit. Their expression showed a lot of warmth and comradery with their teachers and hostel mates.

- Teachers and Support Staff

[Response] Met resident teachers, caregivers, and support staff. They expressed satisfaction with the work environment, and ongoing training (annual govt-led workshops in Guwahati). Two roles flagged as needed (additional special educator + vocational instructor).

- Parents of students

[Response] Did not meet parents this time though I have met them before in previous site visits.

- Other board members

[Response] Met with Hiren Saikia (current head of operations / Secretary). There are a total of 8 board members though I did not meet the others this time other than Saikia and his wife. They hold quarterly review meetings.

Hiren Saikia (secretary)

Makhon Chutia (president)

Bishnu Saikia (Member) - Lecturer, University of Guwahati.

Rita Deka (Member with a Disability)

Madhumita Boruah Saikia

Smriti Rekha Borah

Chittaranian Dutta

Raju Doloi

- How has Asha support helped them?

[Response] Asha Seattle has been the anchor donor since 2014. Recurring support of INR 8,94,000/yr fully funds 11 staff salaries. Asha also provided one-time funding for pukka classrooms, kitchen, dining facilities, hostels, and the new girls' hostel (INR 3,00,000). This predictable core funding lets SHED focus on the children rather than fundraising.

- Plan for the next 5 years?

[Response (1) Grow girls'-hostel enrollment to full capacity (14, +4 by early 2027); (2) Add a special-education teacher and a dedicated vocational-training instructor; (3) Diversify donor base and reduce dependence on a small set of local donors.

Aspirational: (1) Dedicated transportation to expand the day-scholar cohort from underprivileged families; (2) Branch expansion — open a SHED Day Care facility; (3) New Therapy Center in Guwahati city offering specialized care;

Any comments or concerns from the site visit that is a matter of serious concern for Asha? - No

Would you recommend support for the project? - Yes

School Overview

SHED was founded in 2007 by Lanu Aimol and currently run by Hiren Saikia. It is a residential school for children with special needs/disabilities and has classrooms, boarding and associated facilities. In addition to hostellers, SHED also

provides schooling to day scholars with special needs, and to evening students, who attend local government schools and come after their regular school gets over. The integrated school gives a chance for children with special needs to mix with regular children that promotes the well-being of all the children. Asha for Education, Seattle chapter has provided support to SHED since 2014.

Goal and Mission:

To provide a safe and positive environment for children with special needs. Care and rehabilitation, education and proper healthcare so that they can lead lives with dignity and better quality.

Site Visit Write up and Observations

I visited SHED on Dec 23rd 2025 with my family and parents on a recent visit back home. As it was winter holiday, there were no classes or day scholars on that day and some hostellers had gone home. However, I met many resident students as well as all the resident staff and caretakers.

Approach: The Drive Up to SHED

The school sits within an active tea-growing landscape. The drive in (and out) gives a sense of the terrain, the immediate neighbors and the plots that adjoin SHED's own land. It's a safe area in general very close to the Air Force base.



Figure: Tea-garden hillside seen from the vehicle on the way up — fenced terraced cultivation rising into mixed forest.

Hosts and Visiting Family

The new gazebo / visitor pavilion is a meaningful addition to the campus. It allows visiting parents, donors and guests to be received comfortably without disrupting the hostel or classroom blocks.



Figure: Group photograph outside the new visitor gazebo with my parents (seated), spouse, daughter, Saikia and a student.



Figure: Inside the new gazebo / visitor rest area: tiled floor, mosquito-mesh side walls, ceiling fans and a small refreshments table — a nice space for receiving guests and parents.

SHED Main Office and Frontage

The main block continues to anchor the campus. The plantation drive along the front path is a small but visible sign of ongoing campus upkeep.



Figure: Front of the SHED office, and the fenced sapling rows along the path that are part of an ongoing campus plantation drive -with the male students and caregiver.

NEW ADDITION



Fig: Reserve Bank of India Guwahati donated 5 Desktops to SHED and the Students are studying on those computers.

Students and Day-to-Day Life

The interactions the students had amongst each other were comfortable, curious and they were visibly proud to show their work and their hostel — a good indicator of how at home they feel on the campus. I have met many of them in my previous visits, so they are relatively comfortable with us.



Figure: The tire-swing and clothes-drying area behind the hostel — robust, low-maintenance hardware that doubles as a casual gathering spot for the girls.



Figure Left: A senior student near the SHED main block, with the dormitory/classroom range and the dirt courtyard (which doubles assembly space) behind.

Figure Right: Two students near the playground — the younger one holding a small craft she has just finished.

Garden and Outdoor Spaces

The kitchen garden continues to be a low-cost, high-impact part of the campus, using sack and tire planters along existing fences. The outdoor zones around the hostel are simple but well used — doubling as play and gathering space.



Figure: Kitchen-garden patch along the bamboo lattice fence —grown in cement-sack and recycled-tire planters.

Vocational Training and Handmade Items

The vocational team has visibly expanded their catalogue this year. The samples on display ran from inexpensive, high-volume items (keyrings, small wallets) to more elaborate pieces (heart wall-hangings, decorative baskets, macramé planters). Quality and finishing were consistent across pieces — a sign of well-standardized training.



Figure: My daughter and I being proudly presented with their handmade items



Figure: Creative re-use craft: a discarded plastic bottle wrapped in jute macramé, used as a hanging planter for money-plant cuttings



Figure: Decorative basket made from plastic mesh canvas and yarn, with pipe-cleaner flowers and beadwork — to hold a small gift or potted plant.

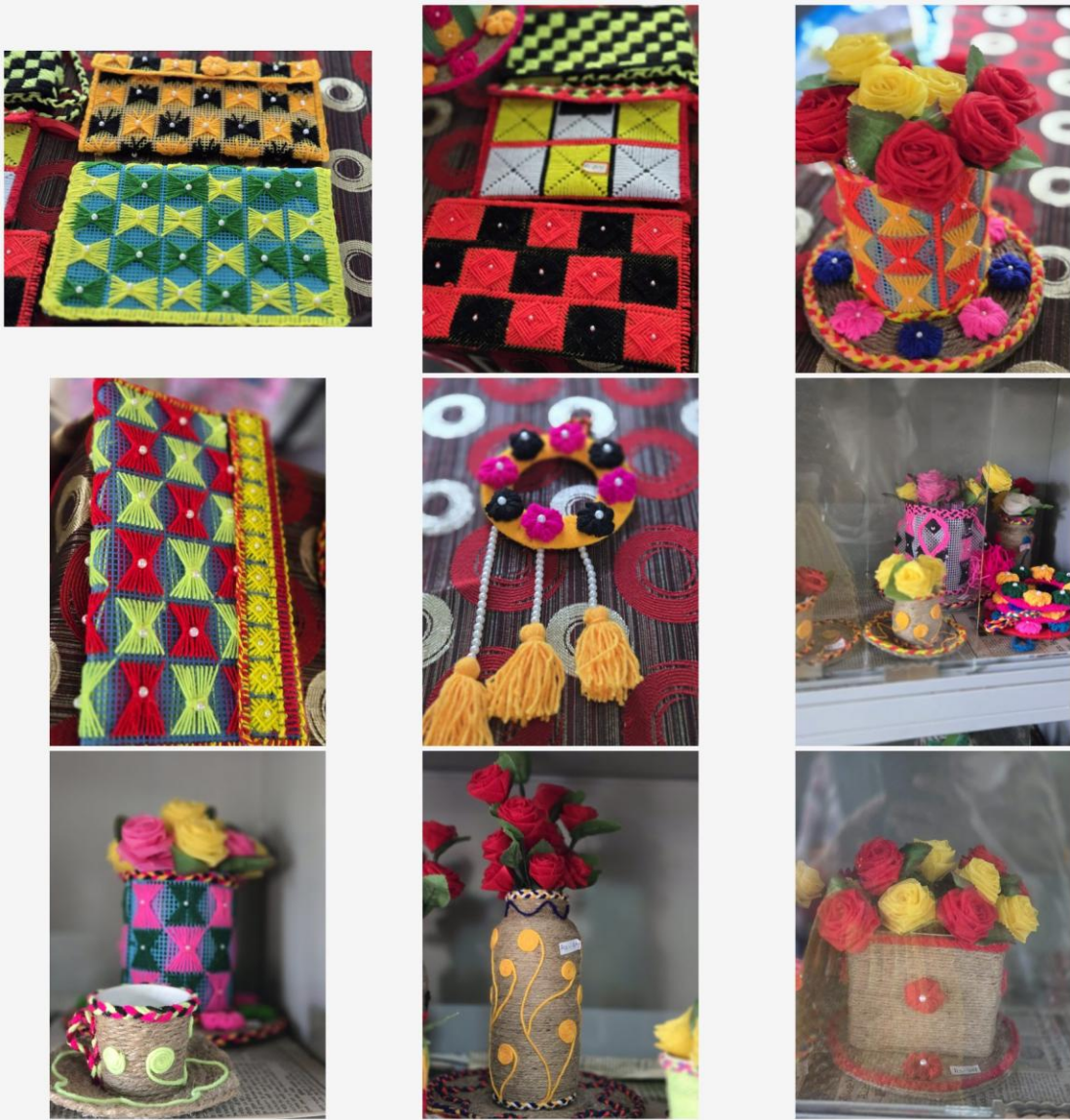


Figure: Handcrafted product range — cross-stitch clutch wallets, woven pouches and decorative pieces in coordinated colors. The consistency in finishing across pieces points to standardized, well-supervised training rather than one-off student work.



Figure: Smaller items: keyring/wallet pendants combining cross-stitch panels with crocheted flower drops. Low-cost, high-volume products, well suited for gifts and fundraisers.



Figure: Larger decorative pieces — heart wall-hangings with mirror-work, applique flowers, central braided panels and woolen tassels.

Girls Hostel — Rooms

I have covered the new girls hostel in detail in previous site visit reports.





Boys Hostel — Rooms

AFNA (Assam Association of North America) contributed to the improvements in the old boys' dorms (previously the girls room converted to a dorm for the younger boys) which were very basic and needed renovations – the roofing upgrades - higher ceilings, better ventilation, flooring. Every aspect of a room in the hostel has to be well thought of – students should not be able to reach the ceiling fans – amongst the boys, smaller ones should be separated out from elder ones due to bullying concerns.



Figure: Interior of the smaller boys dorm, looking up at the new high false ceiling with two ceiling fans.

NOTABLE UPGRADES BY EXTERNAL DONORS

- Qauther Saleh, son of Wahid Saleh a resident of Netherland donated Rs. 1,49,010 for repairing the Toilet and Bathroom of the Boys hostel.
- Wakif Isfaque from Belgium donated Rs. 96,000 for a Septic Tank in the Boys Hostel. The Septic tank was constructed with this money and is currently in use.

Hospitality and Meal

SHED hosted a full mid-day meal on-site, prepared in their own kitchen



Figure: Lunch hosted by SHED secretary and his family who stay adjacent to the campus on a brass thali with a traditional Assamese meal.

Site Visit Notes (from in-person discussions)

New Admissions & Sponsorships

- Neima Begum — 6 years old, from Nagaon; admitted free of charge. Hearing impaired.
- Ajmul and Shubham — siblings, orphaned; admitted ~6 months ago.
- Payal Kataki and Fatima Begum — sponsored under SOS programme.

Staffing & Academic Engagement

- A new assistant teacher (B.Com qualified) joined the SHED staff.
- Pragjyotishpur University students are doing internships at SHED.
- Gauhati University students visit for field trips and engagement activities.

Recent Donations & Community Support

- Jorhat — Kuntal Baruah donated a music system and a washing machine.
- Rotary Club — donate groceries every month.
- Indian Air Force (Digaru station) — community outreach and support (see Christmas event in previous section).
- Dalmia Cement Authority — donated sports equipment to SHED students.
- Warm clothes received from a donor for the children.
- Department of Social Welfare and Afna — supported renovation/upgrade of the boys' room.

Additional SHED Activities

Beyond the Dec 23 site visit itself, SHED participated in two notable external events in December 2025 — the state-level World Disability Day exhibition and the Air Force Station Digaru Christmas outreach. Photos from both, shared by the SHED team, are included below.

World Disability Day Exhibition — Department of Social Welfare (Dec 3, 2025)

On the occasion of World Disability Day (3 December 2025), SHED participated in the state-level event organized by the Government of Assam, Department of Social Welfare. The school's students took part in the on-site drawing competition, and SHED ran an exhibition stall showcasing the handcrafted items produced as part of the vocational training program. The event drew a large turnout of differently-abled students, parents, NGOs and government officials, giving SHED both visibility and an additional sales/fundraising channel.



Figure: Drawing competition under the main event marquee — SHED students seated alongside students from other participating institutions; the exhibition stalls are visible at the right.



Figure: SHED's exhibition stall — visitors and students at the stall, and a closer view of the school's banner with the full range of vocational-training products on display.

Air Force Station Digaru — "Shining Stars" Christmas Outreach (Dec 2025)

SHED was invited as a partner institution by the Air Force Families Welfare Association (AFFWA) at Air Force Station Digaru for the "Shining Stars — Christmas Spirit" outreach event in late December 2025. SHED students and staff were hosted as guests, with refreshments and a dedicated seating area, and were felicitated by the AFFWA office-bearers. Events like this both broaden the students' social exposure outside the campus and strengthen institutional links with local establishments that can support SHED's mission going forward.



Figure: AFS Digaru "Shining Stars / Christmas Spirit" event — group photograph on the lawn, the SHED contingent under the AFFWA banner, candid moments at the seating area and during the cultural program.

Success Stories

Note that in schools like these with the variation of disabilities that you see and the intense customized care required for each student, there is no one formula for Success. What you want to see are examples of students thriving with dignity and preparing for an independent future.



Payel Kotoki is a student with Mental Retardation. When she came first to SHED, she had very little interest in work or studies. Now she is seen to pay attention towards her studies and along with that has shown interest in vocational work and is thriving.

FAHIMA BEGUM - 17



Fahima Begum is a student with Mental Retardation studying under the supervision of a Special Educator. At present, she is being provided with vocational training and being taught cooking and cleaning along with other activities and is making good progress.

AFRUJA BEGUM – 9 yrs



Afruja Begum (Autistic) currently lives in the hostel. She came to school a year ago with inability to do many daily tasks. She is now able to perform daily skills such as going to the toilet, bathing, brushing and cleaning her dishes after eating. Efforts are being made to continue education.