

Virtual Site Visit for Friends of Children

- By Pallavi Kulkarni, July 31, 2022

My name is Pallavi Kulkarni and I am volunteer and project steward for Pune based NGO called Friends of Children (FoC).

Asha Boston started collaboration with Friends of Children in 2014. Friends of Children (FoC) is a Non-profit organization in Pune, Maharashtra that works towards enabling higher education to deserving candidates who otherwise would not be able to afford it. They offer monetary support to students from needy families desiring to pursuing higher education (B.Sc, B.E etc...). Private donors (local as well as international) sponsor the students by donating \$320 per year. FoC provides up to INR 20,000 to deserving students who come from economically poor backgrounds and whose parents cannot afford to support their higher education. They also conduct workshops and training sessions for young adults in professional development and job interview preparation.

Normally as part of site visit, I physically attend one of the workshop sessions which are conducted in Pune. Since the pandemic, FoC started conducting these workshops online and are now slowly started to go back to the in-person workshops. I have relocated to Bangalore and due to personal reasons was not able to visit FoC this year. In order to complete the site visit formalities in order to disburse funds on time, I had an in-detail telephone conversation with Vani Subrmanyam and also virtually attended a goal setting workshop for volunteers.

FoC identified students impacted due to Covid-19 who lost parents and assisted them by providing one time scholarship through their Ujala program. 23 such students were identified, 7 of them were further absorbed into FoC for future scholarships. A total of 159 students were supported by FoC in the academic year 2021-22 which amounted to roughly INR 25lac.

FoC conducted 7 types of workshops online during last year.

1. Umeed - Monthly workshop program
 - a. Total number of workshops held online - 8
 - b. No. of students in each workshop - ~50
 - c. Topics covered - Social etiquette, Anxiety & stress managements, emotional intelligence, teamwork, values & ethics, aptitude test preparation
2. Unnati - Recruitment skill program
 - a. No. of students - 49
 - b. No. of panel members for mock interviews - 27

- c. Topics covered - Attitude & assertiveness, body language during interviews, email etiquette, using Linked-In effectively, sexual harrasment at workplace, financial management
- 3. Uday - Spoken English program
 - a. No of students - 49
 - b. No of volunteers - 43
 - c. Topics covered - Volunteers would have bi-weekly telephonic conversations with students to help them improve spoken english, grammar, vocabulary skills.
- 4. SEP - Spoken English program for penultimate year students
 - a. No. of students - 29
 - b. Topics covered - Precursor to Uday program. Basic pronunciation, rules of grammar & basic conversation in english
- 5. Umang - Alumni participation program
 - a. No. of alumni - 127
 - b. Amount collected - ~4L
- 6. Uttam - Enabling academic toppers achieve excellence
 - a. No. of students - 26
 - b. No of mentors - 4
 - c. Topics covered - Monthly 1-2 hr sessions conducted by mentors with their allotted group of students to focussing on technical, organizational and management skills
- 7. Urja - A listening post for all sponsored students
 - a. Team of alumni assisted students through day to day life challenges, family problems, covid vaccination etc...

Typically it costs INR 70-80K / year to conduct all workshops, but this year they have saved on the cost without compromising on the quality of training. So, they are considering continuing online workshops for some trainings whenever possible. This arrangement is convenient for the trainers as well since it saves them travel to remote areas.

On weekend of July 30, FoC had arranged workshops with volunteers for goal setting and to plan for the upcoming academic year. Although the session was in-person, I called in via zoom participate in this workshop and witness the session.

A group of 20 volunteers had gathered, all of them FoC alumni. The session was conducted by Mr. Manoj Sharma who is associated with FoC for the past several years & is a core team member. As listed above there are many workshops and sessions that are conducted by alumni volunteers to help students navigate through their graduation & professional career. Starting

this year, FoC is looking to incorporate more alumni volunteers to manage and run the workshops independently. This will also help personal growth of the volunteers. Alumni volunteers are encouraged to bring guest speakers who can provide lectures on various technical and non-technical subjects. Manoj motivated the volunteers and assisted them to set targets for the year in terms of how many students each volunteer would mentor / guide. Volunteers also raised some concerns and logistic challenges they sometimes face while organizing workshops. The session was very interactive and I was happy to see active participation by all the volunteers. The energy and enthusiasm they bring are a true asset to FoC.