

Virtual Site Visit for Friends of Children

- By Pallavi Kulkarni, Sept 27, 2020

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. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic FoC is conducting all workshops online. So, this site visit report is an outcome of a detailed telephonic conference call I had with Vani Subramanyam (Founder of FoC) & Swati (administrative assistant). In addition, Swati shared with me conf call link for one of their workshops which I could attend on Sunday.

FoC has currently 170 students enrolled for scholarships pursuing diploma/degree courses. New admissions for 2020-21 have started yet because college admissions are delayed. But they are preparing to conduct interviews for admissions online sometime in October – November. Normally, each year they take in 70 new students, however, this year they are targeting 20-25 students. The drop in the number of students is due to the decrease in donations they have received this year. Each academic year they require INR 22L to support ~200 students, but till date they have got INR 15L as donations. We have seen a significant decrease in the donations coming from Asha as well compared to 2014-2016.

When the pandemic began in Feb-March Vani & team were very worried as to how they would be able to continue with they workshop which they conduct several times a year. The Unnati & Umeed, Uday workshops are very important and provide essential soft skills to these youth & prepare them for a successful professional career. But Vani & Swati informed me that they were pleasantly surprised themselves on how smoothly they are able to carry on with their workshops. They use zoom & skype platform for the workshops & students typically use their

mobile phones as they don't necessarily have computers at home. Vani informed me that even colleges & university classes are being conducted online & students who don't have computer go to a nearby net café to complete assignments 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.

Vani informed me that recently they have received donation of 21 laptops from a local company & they are now in the process of distributing them among students based on need. Vani informed me that they had some students successfully placed in reputed companies.

Name	Class 2020-21	Branch	College name	Placement	Marks
Gaikwad Anjali Ganpat	Final Engg	Computers	Cummins College	Morgan Stanley Capital International	7.79
Malkar Rutuja Ramesh	Final Engg	Electrical	Walchand College of Engg Sangli	DXC Technology	7.83
Mokashi Deepak Ramch	Final Engg	Computers	MES College of Engg	EXFO	8.64
More Rupesh Bharat	Final Engg	IT	MIT Pune	Persistent System	8.5
Jaybhaye Vikas Sharad	Final Engg	Mechanical	Govt College of Engineering Awasari	Araymond Fastners	6.9
Raut Amey Umesh	Final Engg	Mechanical	Samarth Engg College Belhe	Araymond Fastners	7.5
Ghule Yogesh Dinkar	Final Engg	Civil	Govt College of Engineering Awasari	SBH Infraprojects(L & T Construction	7.1

On the weekend of Sept 26-27, FoC had arranged workshop wherein there were several 2 hr learning sessions on skype for students. I also called in to one of the sessions to understand how these sessions are happening online and understand participation & feedback from students. The session was on 'FAQ during interview session' and was conducted by Harshad Joshi. 64 students were invited and 55 had joined on skype. The session was very informative, the content was very well thought from a young applicant's perspective. Mr. Joshi started the session with a very basic question that is usually as an ice breaker in any interview, 'Tell me about yourself'. Mr. Joshi emphasized on how this very basic simple question can create first impression about the applicant and has the power to make or break the deal. I felt like students were quite attentive and were asking questions. The session was very interactive. Other questions discussed were 'tell me your strengths & weaknesses', 'why do you want to work in our company', 'who do you draw inspiration from'.

All these questions are very general yet relevant and are asked at almost all interviews. After attending the session, I thought even I could have benefitted from such a session back when I started my career. I was very impressed with the session as a whole and I am sure this will benefit these young minds to become confident professionals.