Summary:

Samerth Talim Kendra is located in Juhapura area which is considered a minority population area of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. They are currently in a two story leased house which is a permanent structure, has good light, air, and overall in good condition in a good neighbourhood. They currently have 86 disabled children who are mostly 60% - 70% disabled and from very poor families. Per them Government facilities only accept kids with 60% disability only and there is no government facility for such children in the 18 km radius. Some of these kids can't use the toilet on their own, communicate or talk on their own. Some need help getting around as well. 12 of them are severely disable.

Details:

I was given the tour of the facility with Rajul and their wonderful staff. Because of the Covid restriction there were no children present so I could not talk to them or see them in action. I felt they have a very committed and caring staff that go above and beyond to take care of these kids. Their main person in-charge (can't remember her name) has been there since they started and was very kind and caring. They have 3 physiotherapists, 1 speech therapist, 4 special educators and 2 support staff. They said funds from Asha about 29 lakh rupees covers 80% of their expenses and they were very thankful for it and the rest from other donors.

They facilitate kids from ages up to 18 and sometimes even older depending on the need. Most parents of these kids are daily wagers in Vejalpur and Juhapura area. They have 5 classrooms each with 15 kids depending on their age and type of disability. They do regular physical therapy and neuro check up every 2 month for all kids. Children are here 11:00am - 5:00pm. They bring their lunch from home and they provide daily nutritional snacks of kids choice at the center including milk with Bournvita twice a week which they said it’s kids favorite. Their main goal is to teach kids to be physically independent so they can do their own daily work and also to teach them some skills to be financially independent when possible. They have about 20 older kids/adults who are involved in making bead jewellery and paper plates that they sell in local stores. They also offer photocopying services too. They take kids to markets, parks, fairs etc to learn hands-on life skills.

Post Covid, while parents were not working and kids were not coming to school they were providing nutrition kits (eggs, dates, rice, dal, milk) and Rs. 3000 to these families.
to make sure these children were taken care of. But they noticed the kids started regressing what they had learned so they started online training one hour per day via whatsapp video calls. But only 63 out of 86 had access to phones. This included borrowing phones from relatives and neighbors that these teachers have convinced to let them use. After a couple of months, once the Covid restrictions loosened up in the area, the teachers and therapists have started visiting the kids who don’t have access to phones to their homes to work with them one on one.

Wishlist/Future plans

- They would like to have their own bigger facility with a wheelchair ramp so that it’s easier to bring the children inside, they can facilitate more kids and they don’t have to move around. They currently have a waitlist of 80 kids.
- One of the teacher said she would like some wood puzzles and toys for kids to stay busy and learn from.
- Tablets or phones for all children specially the ones who are don't have any access to online learning.

This was my very first site visit and it was a truly rewarding and humbling experience. I have a huge respect for these teachers and therapists who work daily with these kids with so much care and patience. Thank you, I feel fortunate to be part of Team Asha.

Some photos from the visit