

Shades of Happiness Site Visit and Discussion

This document contains details of site visit for SoH by Asha Purdue volunteer (Shivansh), minutes of conference call discussion between Asha Purdue team and SoH project coordinator (Chris Anthony), and second installment poll results. There were few concerns regarding sustainability and the impact of the project, and it was discussed with Chris on call. The report also raised few questions which reflected some of these larger concerns regarding the project. These were discussed over call and recorded in the minutes of conference call document. The contents of this document are –

1. Project Site Visit Report
2. Minutes of Conference Call
3. Discussion on points raised in project site visit report
4. Second installment Poll results

Project Site Visit Report: SHADES OF HAPPINESS

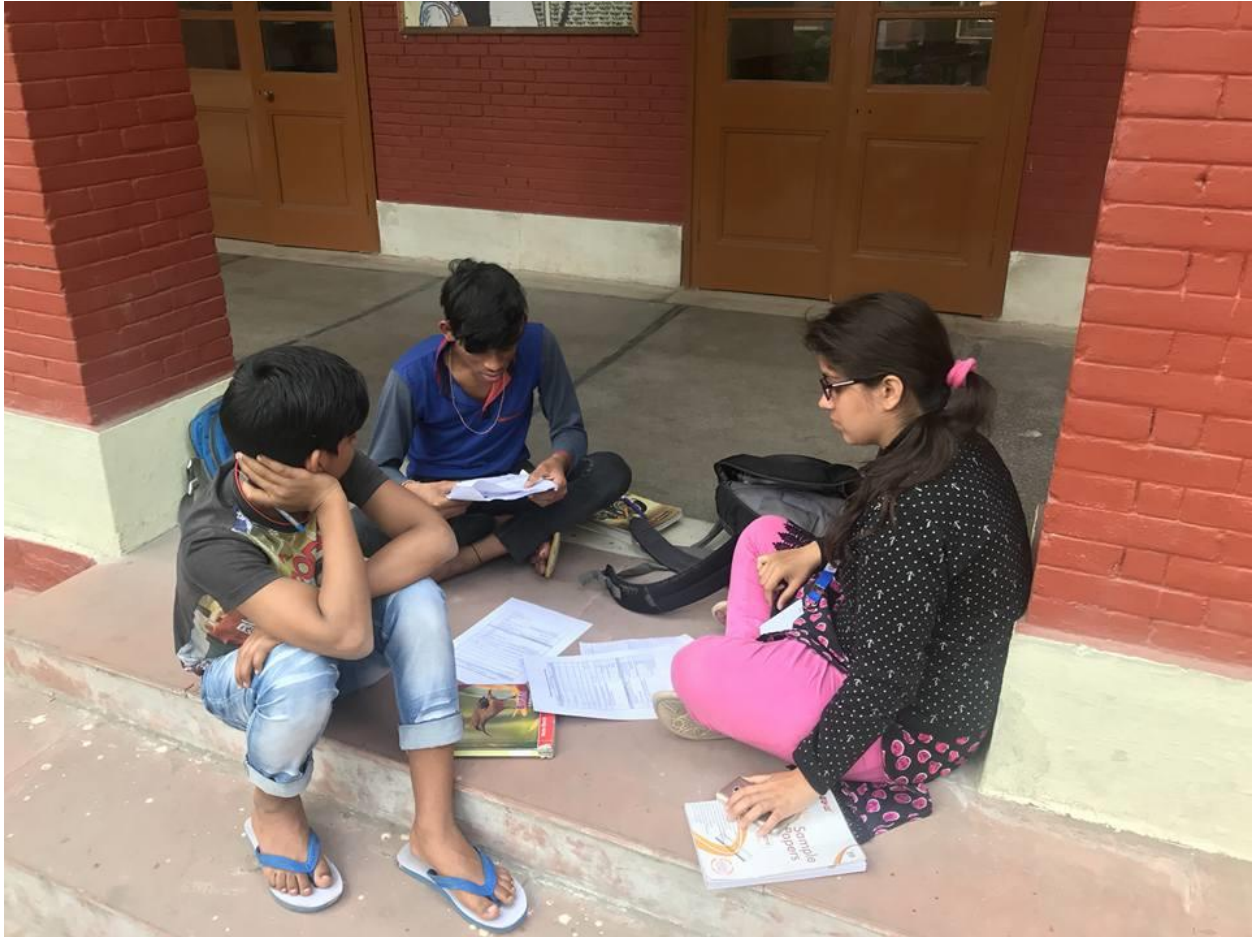
By: Shivansh, Asha Purdue volunteer

I visited shades of Happiness on 24th Feb. I planned to do it on a weekday, but it wasn't made possible citing the reasons that the classes don't run on weekdays anymore. Chris further added that the St Columbus School (the place where organization runs) didn't allow classes in the premises after the school hours anymore. So, the kids are sent to the teacher's residences instead. There is a total of 4 teachers who supervise 40 odd kids from classes 8th, 9th and 10th.

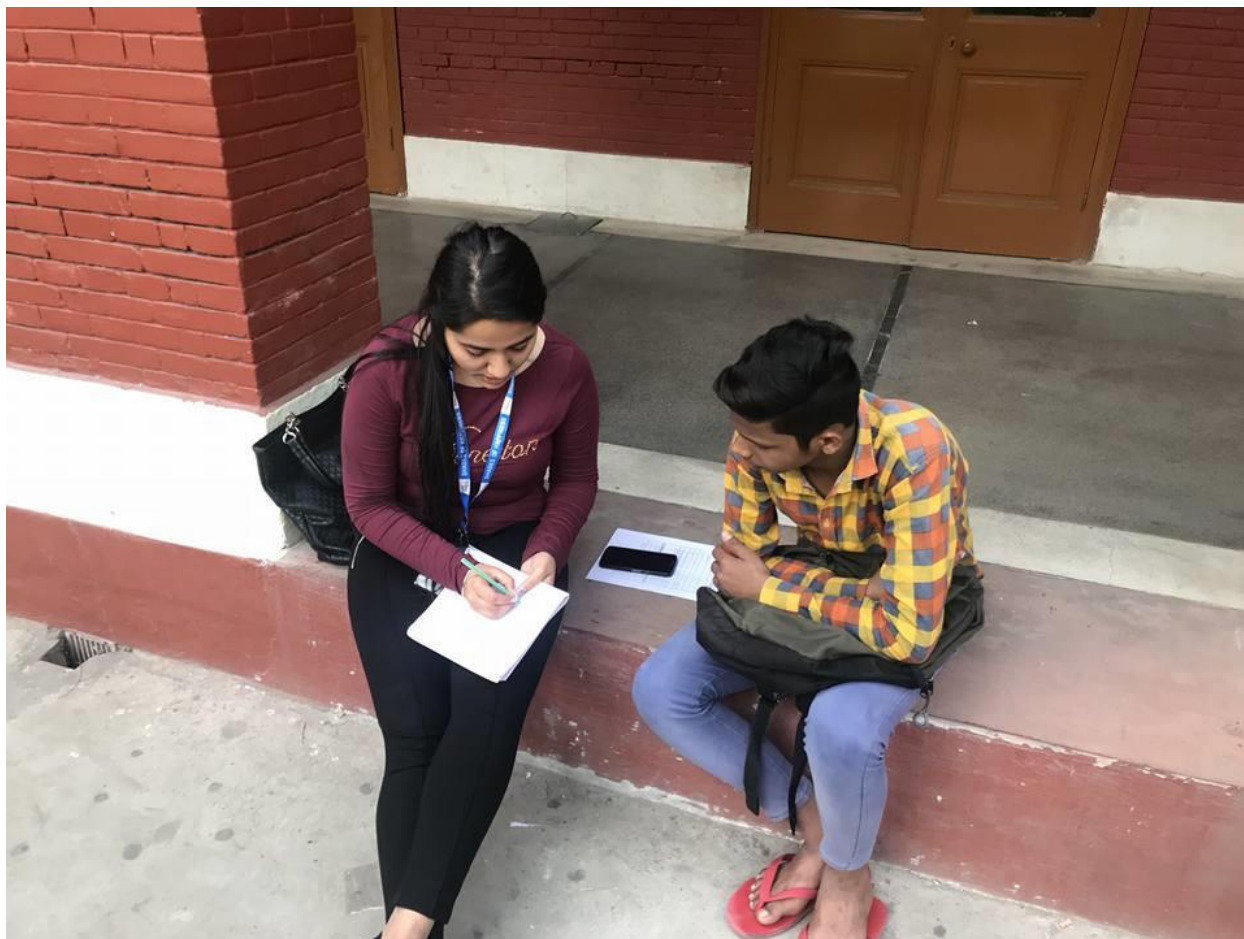


Pic: Golu (white uniform, class 10th) discussing Sanskrit with his classmates

24th Feb was a Saturday and I got to see their classes running in full swing. There were about 10 volunteers teaching kids on a one to one basis. Mostly English, some math and science too. The volunteers were mostly college students from local university. Upon discussion, I came to know that all of them were hired through internshala (a website for hiring interns). A lot of them were new and were teaching since December 2017. They were motivated and most of them had previous experience working in different social sectors.



Pic: Roshni (volunteer), teaching class 10th statistics to arjuna and Sandeep.



Pic: Abhimanyu being taught English by a volunteer (can't remember her name)

There were no signs of the weekday teachers however. I was told that the teachers lived in nearby government headquarters. Though I couldn't give them a visit, I plan to it in the third week of March. But in order to know more about the teachers, I inquired the same set of questions from different kids. I was hoping to find any discrepancies in their answers that can be traced back to a conclusion. Their answers however were satisfactory, and I found the following:

1. The teachers teach student in a batch of 10. And I got positive reviews from the children.
2. Some of the students were irregular to these teachers. We can inquire how SOH is helping in making sure they are present in the classes.
3. Most of the students go only 4 out of 5 days, the reason cited was that there wasn't enough topics to cover

I hope to clear more things in the upcoming visit. I plan to visit the weekday teachers in their residences and touch some more aspects of their weekend training, specially the sustainability

of SOH's model. Presently all the weekday teachers are based purely out of monetary motives. Chris had a view that if SOH pays the teachers, it can hold them accountable if the children aren't performing well. This however was contradicting to the fact the weekend volunteers were unpaid but still contributed quite actively towards the education of the kids in the organization.

Thanks
Shivansh

Follow up site visit on 23rd of March, after the decision was made to fund them:
I visited Shades of Happiness on 23rd of March to meet weekday teachers. I met three out of the four teachers, namely Meenakshi Sharma, Meenakshi Sharma and Ankit Deo.

1. Meenakshi sharma is an ex volunteer at shades of happiness and has been getting salary since April last year. She is associated with SOH from the past 3 years and used to be a weekend volunteer. She has done, B. Com, M. Com and is currently pursuing some Secretary Studies from DU. She teaches students for two hours every day, from Monday through Friday. She manages 12 students, mostly class 8th, 9 and 10th. And gets paid Rs12k.
2. Meenakshi Sharma is also an ex volunteer at Shades of Happiness. She has a background in Hindi Literature and teaches History, Geography and Political Science. She is also teaching at Jawahar Navoday Vidyalaya and is applying for a PhD next year. She teaches the students of class 11th and 12th. She's currently managing 3 students and gets paid Rs 3k per month.
3. Ankit Deo is the only male teacher in the group and is a student of Architecture. He is currently pursuing his education in IGNOU. He is associated with Shades of Happiness from the last 5 years. He too used to be an unpaid volunteer who is now getting paid since April last year. He teaches the 12 students of class 9th.
4. The fourth teacher wasn't available. Her name is Savita. The proposed budget had 40 children. I'd assume that the rest 13 go to her.

Red Flags

1. All the teachers were unpaid volunteer at SoH till last year. And now they are paid as a teacher at Rs1k per student.

2. The teachers were teaching together at St Columbus School for 6 months but didn't seem to know each other. (even if we don't consider the time when they were volunteering prior to 2017)
3. There were a lot of uncertainties in their answers, e.g when asked about how many children come to them daily...they gave a round figure initially. Like 10-12. This was a major concern since they've been with the children for almost a year now.

Call with Shades of Happiness: Minutes of Conference Call

03/11/2018

Attendees:

Adarsh
Chris (SoH)
Kushagra
Neha
Praveen
Rachana
Rohil
Shivansh
Surabhi
Vidhi

Background:

Why did we have this call?

"We will have a conference call with Chris this weekend. We can ask him questions related to the model, or any other questions you have. We will also decide about the disbursement of remaining amount after the call." - *from email sent to asha-purdue-core on Mar 9 titled 'Update on Shades of Happiness'; please check that to understand context better.*

Call contents:

What happened on the call?

1. Q&A with Chris : *1h 30 min*
2. Sharing opinions and discussion among Asha volunteers : *25 min*

Q&A with Chris:

On sustainability

$\frac{3}{4}$ of our SoH funding goes towards tuition component of ~40 children (class 8th to 10th) as salary for their tutors which happen on weekdays (after school hours, at tutors' homes currently). Since these tutors teach for the salary they receive, and not as volunteer just driven by motivation, the per teacher cost is high and this model is not sustainable as it would always require continuous supply of funds.

Chris explained the difficulties he faced while trying to get motivated (and low/zero cost) volunteers to teach on weekdays in these terms -

- Most of the self motivated volunteers are college students who get time only on weekends. They do come for the weekend activities and classes though.
- Chris told that he found it easier with paid teachers to hold them accountable for children's results

- It was not possible for him to get the former children (of SoH who are working now) back in their society as tutors. [Note that the paid tuition weekday program started 4 years ago, and there are not many 'graduated' children who are working now]
- Even if he gets supply of volunteers for weekdays, it is not guaranteed. As an example, he mentioned that there was a collaboration with volunteers from Teach for India for one year. But later, TFI stopped providing volunteers for NGOs and kept its focus only on providing full time teachers in government schools.

On Impact

There needs to be an understanding of what's the impact of the project (both in terms of quantity and quality), as in, what would be the difference in the lives of these children (and the nearby society) in the absence of this program.

Chris shared his understanding of the impact in these terms-

- The children belong to the nearby slum areas and this program is preventing dropouts. It tries to enable them to pass atleast highschool so that they can use this minimum required educational level to get jobs. He told that number of dropouts decreased from two years ago to last year (2-4 dropouts saved, total strength of students is ~40).
- He told that few cases of the children who 'graduated' from the program- one work as ticket examiner in Humayun's tomb, one is doing B.Com., another is studying design. Few of these children visit SoH sometimes.

On backup (lack of team?)

Currently, Chris is solely responsible for motivating children to go to tuition classes. He was asked about any backup/active partner who could take care of his duties towards SoH in case he is not available.

He told us that there is another person, Abhinav who helps with SoH work sometimes but his primary work is something else (this guy is working on a digital literacy project).

At this point of time, it seems that SoH lacks a dedicated team.

Weekend Activities

Currently weekend activities take place on Saturday: 3 pm : 5:30 pm and Sunday: 10 am - 1 pm and involve English classes, educational workshops, meal etc. College students (mostly through Internshala) come as volunteers to teach children. On a question about whether scientific experiments are shown to children during these sessions, Chris told that this activity does not take place frequently as he could not procure necessary equipments to show experiments to children. There were few suggestions for weekend activities -

1. Verbal (Saturday) and grammar (Sunday) classes can be combined as both are/should be complementary skills.
2. Weekend activities can be conducted in more structured way. They can fix a list of specific topics to be covered during weekend classes. If possible, these topics can be followed by a related weekend excursion. For example, a topic in history can be followed by a visit to a history museum.

On condition of schools

Chris admitted that the government schools did observe an improvement in quality of infrastructure due to the efforts of current state government but the motivation of teachers still remain an issue. He cited a case where a 9th class girl student was not allowed to take her final exams by her teacher at school but Chris intervened in that situation to address teacher's concerns and got the permission for the student to take her exams. Also, corporal punishment is still an issue even though it is banned in schools and he is making efforts to address that issue as well. He emphasized that he ensures that children don't face such problems in the tuition.

Other efforts

Chris also mentioned his efforts apart from the weekend and weekday activities, like menstrual hygiene awareness and efforts against corporal punishments in schools. He also mentioned that in the past, he used to raise money for SoH through fundraising events like organizing sports competition and social events (like 'Swachh mela' - got 1.5 lacs from UNICEF for that).

On requirement of disbursing the remaining amount for this cycle

Chris informed that the tutors have not been paid since February because of delay in fund disbursement but the classes are still going on.

Asha members' feedback after Q&A with Chris:

- Not very confident about the quantum of impact of this project on lives of the beneficiary children/society. It seemed that the impact might not be of similar level to that of our other projects.
- Chris mentioned several examples where he tried things and failed (like getting motivated volunteers for weekday/ arranging for experiments during weekend). The good point about this is that he had put efforts to solve the issues and admits the failures. However, there were few opinions that he should have tried harder to solve these issues before arriving the conclusion of '*kar chuka hun ye, nahi ho paata hai*' (tried that, it doesn't work).
- Vision seems to be lacking, and that gets reinforced by lack of team. He needs to be more thoughtful, and put structure around the activities to achieve a well thought direction
- He needs to work on communication skills as well. Many times, conversation became longer than required because of not-so-satisfactory and to-the-point answers from him

Actionables

- Kushagra and Rohil will create the polls to decide on how much should we send as the remaining funds of this cycle. *ETA*: end of this week for deciding and executing the disbursement
- We will give a collective feedback to Chris about the general concerns and suggestions from Asha volunteers. We will share our recommendations about developing a vision (and a team).
- We have to also connect Chris to our other project partners who have lot of experience and resources to share with him, to benefit SoH.
 - We already connected him to Sandhya ji (Aavishkar) and he had a discussion with her

- We have recommended him to attend 'humari shiksha' workshop at Aavishkar (31st Mar to 2nd April) which would be a great place to discuss and learn from the experiences of others working in the area of education. We can also decide to fund this component, if it happens
- The feedback we share with him will also indicate to him that development of vision and addressing few important concerns (mentioned above) is necessary to have continued funding
- There will also be a discussion in future on - should we renew the funding of SoH in next cycle; if yes, how should we distribute it among the tuition and weekend components. This will also depend on the progress shown by SoH, as mentioned in last point.

Ref: Project Report: Shades of Happiness (-Shivansh, visited SoH on 24th Feb)

Discussion on points raised in site visit report

1. The teachers are pursuing their own higher studies. Initially they used to teach for free but later they started taking salary to be able to fund their own education.

This connects to the larger discussion on sustainability in the minutes of conference call.

2. When Shivansh had asked the students about their teachers, he got pretty much consistent answers. Also, since these days the classes are being held at different locations, not knowing each other can be explained to some extent.

3. Different teachers teach different number of students per class (as less as 3 to as high as 12). Sometimes, few children are irregular and hence the exact number is not consistent.

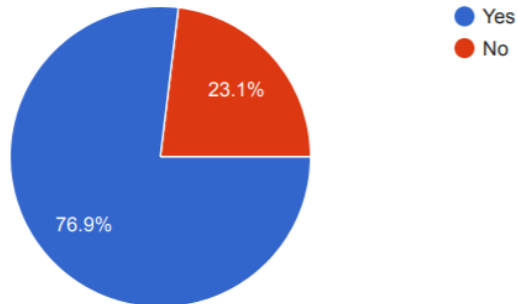
Following is the poll results on disbursement of remaining amount of this cycle. In the light of larger issues with the project, it is re-iterated that the funding will be continued in next cycle only if all these major concerns are well addressed by Shades of Happiness.

Shades of Happiness Poll (2nd Installment)

13 responses

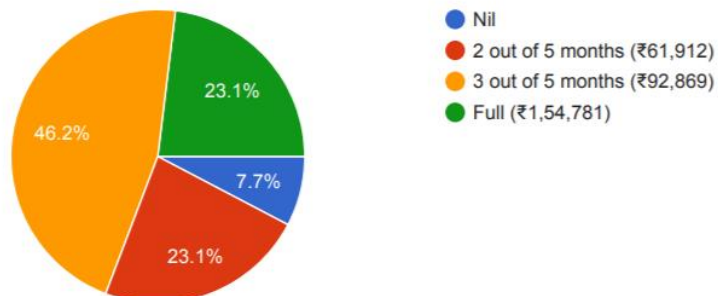
Should we disburse the remaining amount (upto ₹2,33,890) for this project?

13 responses



How much of tuition component (₹1,54,781) should we support?

13 responses



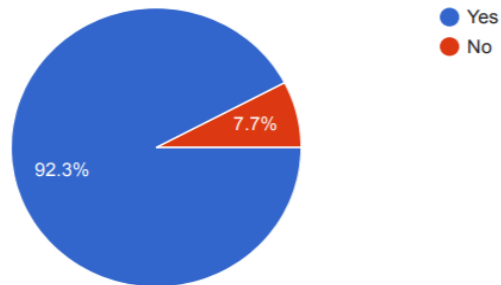
Should we support the weekend component (₹79,109 - books, stationary, insurance, student counselor, excursions, snacks)

13 responses

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/2018

Shades of Happiness Poll (2nd Installment)



Comments to support your answer

8 responses

I have voted no as I want to know more if we are convinced with his response. Are we convinced enough? If so then my vote is yes for full 5 months.

Give him two months' time to show vision and sustainable plan

The reason for supporting 3 out of 5 months is that it will give both motivation and sufficient time to work on a more sustainable plan. The weekend component seems important as it keeps the students motivated to come to SoH and learn important skills that are not taught in tuition. If the project has a more clear vision and direction it can grow and have a significant impact.

The weekend support can be limited up to the essential parts such as books and stationary. I think we can find them for this time and think about future support.

We should give Chris 2 months time to come up with a plan for future. If it is found satisfactory, we can move forward otherwise discontinue support.

The project lacks vision and sustainability.

Stopping funding in between might hamper the growth and studies of children hence for this term we should give them a chance.

My response is based on the call we had with them. Current model doesn't seem sustainable and there is a lack of vision. Weekend activities need to be more structured. I am fine with spending money on insurance, books or stationary but it seems major part is going towards excursions which are not planned properly.

Voting participants: Adarsh, Anusha, Gaurav, Kushagra, Neha, Prasoon, Rachana, Ram, Rohil, Saurav, Shivansh, Surabhi, Vidhi

Further clarifications and conclusions:

1. Upon further conversations with the members who responded with a no, it was understood that there need to be many corrective actions about the direction the project is taking in terms of it's sustainability, and only upon this condition may the funds be released.
2. Amount of funds that could be supported was decided to be 3 months of tuition: Rs. 92,869 and full component of weekend activities: Rs. 79,109. Making it a total of Rs. 1,72,000 (rounded off to nearest 1000)
3. Chris, the main person of SOH be informed of the concerns of the volunteers as mentioned in the comments section.