

Kankura Masat Social Welfare Society Virtual Site Visit 2021

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Background

The Kankura Masat Social Welfare society is located in rural West Bengal. It provides schooling for children from Pre-K to 4th grade and a coaching center for older children. Traditionally, Asha London has funded coaching center related expenses and Asha Minnesota has funded Tiyas school related expenses. More information about the school can be found in the original site visit report. Since the school was shut down at the time of the site visit (due to summer break starting soon and a new wave of covid cases), a lot of the visit was conversation based and focused on discussing the hardships the school and local community have faced due to the pandemic.

Covid Related Struggles in Community:

Unfortunately people in the community have had reduced access to beds and hospitals. At the time of the visit many testing centers and hospitals in the area were closed. Additionally, almost every household in the area has had or is currently having 1 or 2 covid cases. This is largely due to people not wearing masks or not having the ability to get tested for COVID. Another big challenge in the community is child trafficking due to poverty caused by COVID. Many households are desperate for money so they sell their 12-18 year old girls into child trafficking. Although this is a problem Asha cannot solve, improving the education of women in Kankura Masat will help give them the tools to control their own future. This makes our role in this organization even more general.

Covid related struggles in school:

During the site visit we talked to one of the school teachers Ms. Suparna. She teaches English and Bengali for class 2,3 and 4. Due to COVID students have not been attending school in person since April 26th. She has been trying to teach students in small group settings over the phone. This is very challenging due to the internet connection being faulty. Students who understand what she is teaching can tell her they understand the material, and students who don't understand receive a call back later on to review the material with her one-on-one. Another challenge other teachers shared was that parents need to be engaged in order to foster student engagement with their education. Parents have been extremely busy during COVID and don't see the point of encouraging their kids to learn online- which makes it a lot harder for the kids to be motivated. Additionally, many families also only have one cell phone which parents take to work. Therefore kids do not have a device to learn on. This means that one major need for the school this year is cell phones.

Seeing the Building:

After talking to the teachers we took a tour of the building. Mr. Sajal showed us a new playground on the premises. The playground is very beautiful with a lot of fun colorful murals. The equipment looks very sturdy. It looks like a lovely area for the school children after COVID is done. We also briefly saw many of the coaching center students who have been allowed to sit in the classrooms. They were all spread out but there were more students on the premises than I expected. However, since they were in class, we did not get the opportunity to speak with them.

Further Needs:

Due to school being online for the foreseeable future, more teachers at the school need better computers. This will help them teach online more easily. Students could also benefit from having a phone so that it is easier for them to do work online.