**Site Visit Report**

**Project** – Astha

**Location** – Basti Vikas Kendra, Bal Mukund, Girinagar, Kalkaji, New Delhi, Delhi 110019, India

**Date** – May 2nd, 2016

**Done by** – Rohini Muthuswami (Asha Delhi volunteer) -

Aastha is located near Govindpuri Metro Station in Giri Nagar.  The Delhi Urban Shelter has given the Basti Vikas Kendra premise to Aastha for rent.  Both Sudha Vohra and Jayashree (whom I had met in my previous site visit) have retired and Rupin has taken over as the executive director.  This is one of the first projects where I am observing continuity after the retirement of the founding directors. Generally, NGOs tend to be personality driven and very often die out if the founding member retires or dies.  In that sense I was very happy to see a continuity in Aastha.

Rupin explained that there are two major projects funded by Asha Seattle or rather you gave about Rs 8 lakhs and they decided to use it for both their Helpline and Resource center. Again, when I had previously visited Aastha they were about to set up their help line and I remember discussing it with them.  They have both call-in and walk-in facilities. The person handling it has left and currently Rupin handles it with another trainee. I met the trainee too. They have two computers in the helpline room and it is dedicated to the helpline work. They maintain case sheet, and thus are able to keep track of the calls and if necessary for follow up purposes. They do both counselling as well as helping with issues like how to get disability certificate. They generally handle about 5-8 calls per day and as many walk-ins.  They  used to have a toll free number when they were supported by National Trust; however, the National Trust and they have gone their separate ways and now they do not have a toll free number even though they are registered with National Trust.  They also have one city wide and one nationwide helpline network. The city wide network meets 4-5 times a year and they cross-refer; So if for example they get a call from a person require help with sexuality issues then they will refer them to that appropriate helpline.  and vice versa. The nationwide helpline meets once a year and Rupin mentioned that Asha Seattle funded the just held meeting.  The helplines are crucial given how little people have help with regards to disability- either their own or of their children. Very often more than help they need counselling and Rupin mentioned that they do extensive counselling.

Resource Center- This is located within Aastha premise. A small room has been set aside. They have two trained personnel, one ayah and Anuradha, who is now handling office work, is also a trained special needs instructor. The room was clean and tidy and the children were seated on a durriee. Two children had come with their parent (mother) and Rupin explained that if a parent wants to bring their child, they allow that.  Otherwise the children are from nearby as well as from far off locality and Aastha provides transportation.  They also provide fruits and milk as snacks.  When I visited, the instructor was telling them a story and then Anuradha joined in. The story was about making friends with a tree with lots of movements to help the child learn to move their hands and feet. I felt Anuradha was a very natural teacher but now she is tied up with the office work. The other instructor was also very patient but she did not have the spontaneity that Anuradha- but that could be also because of experience. It was really fun watching them work with the children. Many of the children have cerebral palsy and therefore, difficulty in locomotor movements, which is what they were trying to help child with. Couple of children had severe disability. I remember that during my previous visit, the children were dispersed in two rooms but now they are conslidated in one place. There is both group therapy session as well as individual therapy session. They were not doing individual session when I had previously visited them.  So Monday and Thursday are group session days, Tuesday  and Friday is the individual session and Wednesday they visit Swami Dayanand Hospital in Shahdara to work with children in the hospital.

In addition to these, Aastha also does lot of community work as well as liaison with hospitals.

Rupin mentioned that they have asked for Rs 14 lakhs which is quite a large sum but they want to expand.  The helpline requires considerable funding because of the telephone charges. I feel that we should try to support both the projects as they are really needed in these communities.