Muskaan Site Visit

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Muskaan has been working with slum children in Bhopal since 1997.

Muskaan has the following three programs:

1. Balawadis: This is a pre-school program for small children. They are typically in the slums located where the children live. Currently Muskaan is running baalwadis for four slums in Bhopal.

2. Jeevan Shiksha Pahel: This is an informal learning program for slum children. Most of the children who live in slums do rag picking everyday from 5 am to 10 am. They need to do so to support their families with additional income. The Jeevan Shiksha Pahel programs provide such children an opportunity to learn and express themselves. The curriculum followed in these programs is very flexible and the motivation is to make the learning enjoyable and meaningful. They are encouraged to take national exams (5,8,10th classes). Muskaan has several classes which are part of Jeevan Shiksha Pahel, some located in the office location and some of the programs are run in the slums.

3. Residential camps: Most of the children are first generation learners. Under pressure from parents and community, they do not have the opportunity to focus on the education. In residential camps, the children will have the opportunity to go away from their troubles at home and spend some months among other children to focus on their education and have the opportunity to express themselves freely.

Motivation of our Visit:

Asha Frankfurt supported Muskaan Baalwadis in 2010 and currently evaluating the girls hostel proposal. This visit is meant to understand the ground realities and see the impact of Muskaan work first hand.

We spent two days at Muskaan and visited Ganga Nagar Basti, Residential Camp and Jeevan Shiksha Pahel centers and a Balawadi.

Ganga Nagar Basti:

We arrived Muskaan office in afternoon and met up with Brijesh. Muskaan office looks more like a school with children of different ages, learning going on everywhere and in between playing. Some of the Jeeval Shiksha Pahel classes are held here. There we also met Geeta, who is from Ganga Nagar slum. She is preparing for 10th class exams. With Geeta and Brijesh we went to Ganga Nagar Basti.

Ganga Nagar Basti is a typical city slum, where between normal buildings there is a open space and there the people built their huts and they have been living there for thirty years. There were about 20 families living in a small area. Most of the people work as
daily wage workers and the children go for rag picking. Some of the families do informal jobs (like buying metal and making stoves out of them to sell at the market).

When we reached the place, a crowd surrounded Brijesh and they were happy to see him. There was one elderly woman, who was saying she gave her child to Shivani and now her child is Shivani’s daughter. It was heartening to see such trust between Muskaan team and the families.

There was a small place between the road and a wall, which used to be a garbage place. It was then cleaned by youths in the area and now it is used as vocational training/working center for women. There the woman learn and do stitching.

We also visited the house of Geeta. It was very small one room place (probably less than 10 sqm), where on one side Geeta was having her lunch/dinner and other side one of her brothers was sleeping. Her mother started talking about how proud she is of Geeta, how that she has been going to school and how good she is at learning. Even though Geeta has not completed 10th class yet, for her mother she had already achieved something which few in her community achieved so far.

As long as we were there, people keep approaching Brijesh. One person came with a handicap certificate of his son with the complain that they are not getting the allowance from the government which they should get regularly. By the end of the day, we realized that for the people in that basti, Muskaan is the window to the world and they all feel part of the Muskaan family.

At the end of the day, we took a auto to go back to the hotel. The auto is owned by one of the youth from the Basti who attended Muskaan school and is now self employed!

**Residential Camp**

On Day 2, morning Brijesh came and picked us up from the hotel and we drove to the residential camp, which is in the outskirts of Bhopal. It was an adventures drive with 3 people on a bike.

The residential camp building is owned by a management institute. For the past couple of years one separate building has not been in use. They are generous to allow Muskaan to use as a residential camps.

When we visited the camp, there were about 15 children and 2 caretakers cum teachers there. Some of the children are preparing for their exams. The main focus of Muskaan team is to make learning more enjoyable for the children and teach them the way they can understand. When we were there one child with the name “Aman” was sitting outside the building and writing a story about a pig while watching the pigs there. There was another child writing a short story about a butterfly while watching it.

In the classroom children were learn reading and writing with the words they use every day. To make learning more enjoyable, Muskaan uses the Sangathi Kit which is interactive teaching-learning kit ([http://avehiabacus.org/sangati.html](http://avehiabacus.org/sangati.html)).
All the children are very energetic and enjoy whatever they were doing. We are convinced that the residential camp providing the opportunity for the children to get away from difficult family surroundings and spend couple of months with fellow children like normal children playing, laughing and learning, have a great impact.

**Jeevan Shiksha Pahel:**

Muskaan runs several classes under this program. Some of the classes were held in Muskaan office premises and some in near by places where children are from. In the office premises different classes were held. When we were there children were making puppets for an Indian theater. They all were very lively and creative.

**Balawadis:**
We visited one Balawadi in a slum area. When we were there children were drawing different animals on the floor of the classroom with the chalk to prepare them for later learning to hold a pen to write with. They all were very lively and creative. They were served a lunch time meal.

**Conclusion and Final Comments:**

- Muskaan has a very dedicated, committed and energetic team. They understand the needs of the community and has built a very good relationship with the community.
- Muskaan is using innovative learning tools to make learning enjoyable for the children. In some cases they bought some learning tools and in some they prepared on their own. They are very creative and have good understand of children education.
- Children in Muskaan run programs enjoy being there and all of them feel part of the big Muskaan family.
- Muskaan tries to work towards finding solutions for community problems, not only focusing on education.
- Asha Frankfurt can work closely with Muskaan in financially supporting time limited projects (like providing infrastructure, learning materials etc) and also see if some of the Muskaan learning methodologies can be used in other projects.
Photos:

More photos are at
https://picasaweb.google.com/100437342041064140331/BhopalMuskaanSiteVisit?authkey=Gv1sRgCPmr15Wz5Y2y7gE