

Site visit to Mahesh Fellowship

December 7 and 8, 2012

I met with all 12 children at Nankari hostel for boys where they have been staying for last 5 years. This hostel is in the Nankari village adjacent to IIT Kanpur. I found the boys to be very cheerful, content and optimistic about their future. They are now in middle to high school and hence primarily focused on their subject learning. In my conversations, I attempted to understand their abilities in subjects, critical thinking, creativity and languages. They are making remarkable and sustained progress in their learning. They all still study at the Ramakrishna Mission school and find the quality to be adequate. This is the best possible school available to them in the area.

Their school environment is adequate for learning the subjects but does not seem to encourage critical thinking, creativity nor does it customize learning to individuals. Lot of subjects are learned through one way instruction and memorization. The quality of English language learning is also weak. There are some sports and extracurricular activities at school.

The boys have to compensate for the school environment at home. They have some IIT Kanpur students come by to help with learning. Mahesh and other volunteers create the space for creative expression through encouraging writing poems and stories, newsletter and theater. They are also learning the respect for each other, their communities and the environment and resources. Asha DC volunteer Rashi has shown interest in meeting the boys regularly through Skype for English instruction.

The construction of new residential building with space for 50 children is expected to be complete by summer of 2013. This facility will eventually house 100 boys and girls. Mala India has supported the construction costs of Ek Kadam project. Mahesh has spent inordinate amount of effort over last two years supervising the construction and buying materials and parts. The boys will face problem with commuting to school once they start to live there.

Photos of the construction:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/114752551611493239710/EkKadamConstructionProjectPhotoGraphDec2012?authuser=0&authkey=Gv1sRgCJqZ7Mf00dbtQA&feat=directlink>

While I was visiting Kanpur, Mahesh arranged a meeting of many civic society organizations of the city to discuss the India Pakistan conflict situation and inability of people to get visa to visit each other. As a leading activist in the city, he struggles for the liberties and rights of the people on very regular basis. Meeting was well attended by local media persons as well. At the meeting, it was obvious that Mahesh is well recognized for his work and has a great standing among the civil rights and welfare organizations of the Kanpur city.

Mahesh continues to supervise the RTI Kanpur campaign with Shankar now spending full time effort at RTI center in Kanpur helping people meet their needs without falling prey to corruption in government departments. Shankar himself left the corrupt government clerical position to take up this role inspired by Mahesh's work.

Mahesh bhai's team also continues to launch anti-corruption campaigns in nearby villages and towns. He motivates and trains many youth and IIT students to work in public interest arena.

Sirish Agarwal