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Report of Visit to Borderless World Foundation homes

Context

I spent in total close to two weeks across the homes. I went there with an open mind, to agree and to disagree and wasn't sure how my travels would turn out prior to making the trip.

In the end, I had a great time.

To give a bit of a context to the report, Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most under developed states in the country. Most of the state makes do with non-existent roads. In one of the districts, where a BWF home sits, they don't have proper electricity or even health centres/clinics/any kind of medical facilities within the range of many kilometres.

To make things a bit more interesting conflict and militancy have made things a lot more difficult for kids who are most affected. Basic things that a kid needs are difficult to be catered for. Shelter, Food, Clothes, School. Most kids have been directly affected by the conflict. A parent killed by a militant or in conflict. Most kids are from areas where militancy has been rife. I travelled with the mother of the kids, she was kind enough to take me from Anantnag to Kupwara, from one of the homes to the other. After her husband died she couldn't afford to keep her children at home, even if the school fees and mid day meals were taken care of.

The harsh weather conditions combined with bad infrastructure makes it extremely difficult to do things that we all take for granted. I have been told that in Kupwara in the winter when the gas cylinders get over, Adhik Kadam himself used to take the empty cylinders on foot to the town which is at least a couple of kilometres away, in the icy cold with thick snow on the road.

What has been done

For the kids, this is their home. And they love it out there. A home, the environment that is home, is very difficult to create when there are kids from

different backgrounds, different pasts. And also when the number of kids who are in need also increases.

There is a great system in place where the older kids take care of the younger kids. The kids are extremely well mannered, and well taken care of. Here they get access to education, are fed wholesome meals, get warm clothes for winter and good clothes for summer, and they have a home, where they feel safe.

- Its a home , for the kids.
- Access to public education where they go to schools and get help with their studies through tuition or through the older kids.
- They lead a very disciplined life, having meals on time, doing laundry during the weekends, having a schedule for every activity
- They eat wholesome meals.
- The kids are looked after really well, by the staff or by the older kids. Even in bigger groups kids get individual attention
- During the harsh winter they get warm clothes, and a relatively warm home
- Better understanding of the outside world compared to other students in the class, thanks to the exposure they get through people like Adhik and his friends who visit and share the knowledge of the world with the kids
- A lot of the kids have toured places like Mumbai, Pune, and attended a children's film festival in Hyderabad, and this has expanded their view of the world. And its been a great experience for them, and this is something they probably will not get in any school in their district or even Kashmir

What can be done to improve their lives

Some of the points have been partly implemented already, or the team knows about these issues but I feel they need more support, in terms of resources or qualified help

- There is only one Adhik Kadam

Adhik's day is spent on multiple things and I feel there is a lot of dependency on him, in terms of what is the greater vision of the organisation and also sometimes in terms of getting things done, though probably not as before as the day to day management of the homes is taken care of by the staff.

Adhik needs to focus a lot of energy into gathering support for his work, and also into operations of the organisation. And I feel that there should be someone who is qualified and passionate, to support Adhik in his operational part, and if possible in the former as well.

- Regular interruptions of electricity to the homes

When there is no electricity, the study time for kids gets interrupted. This affects all the kids and especially the ones that are studying for their exams. It would be good to get some kind of renewable energy source installed, like a solar power source to have uninterrupted power supply, and also having like an inverter as a backup. There are couple of homes who have the diesel/ kerosene powered generators but the other two don't have any.

- More facilities in some homes

Some homes like beerwah though are in the centre of the town, will run out of capacity soon, but at the same time it also needs good facilities as the older kids would be based in of beerwah.

- Alternative Educational methods

There is a lot of focus on studying and learning as per the needs of the school. 8th, 10th and 12th class students are under a lot of pressure to study, learn and complete their lessons. There is generally a lot of emphasis on following the system which isn't catered to individual needs. So the kids need to go through alternate learning methods. There are many platforms where kids can get access to these methods, but it would be great if someone from Asha can help with the resourcing part. That is if someone who is qualified can come and work with the kids for a few weeks. In most cases it also takes the stress of a child, as the kid thinks she is in the wrong most of the times, when the usual learning ways don't work.

- Interaction with people from different professions to understand what they can do next in their lives

This is a question that every child thinks about at all phases of their lives. The kids at the homes are a very talented lot. But to realise their potential they need to know what is out there in the big bad world. They need to interact with people from different professions and understand what does their day look

like, why they like their jobs and what it entails. This is partially done, but it needs to be done more and more

- Focus into Arts and Crafts

In the education system that all of us are used to, there is less emphasis on arts and crafts and more on the normal routine ways, where kids go on to become either or a doctor. Kids who are artistically inclined need to be not only encouraged but also guided into learning more of the art forms that interest them. They also need to understand that it is a profession that they can pursue in the future as well, so as not to be disheartened. So if Asha can get artists who can teach kids to visit the homes that will be great

- More emphasis on Exercise and the right Diet

As of now most of the kids have wholesome food. But it would be great if a nutritional expert can advise on best nutrition intake for the kids and also review the foods that the kids eat, and also the fluids that they drink. Along with the right exercise. When the kids fall ill, its directly linked to their diets more often than not. Eating the right foods with the right exercise also builds immunity in the long run.

- More staff to support homes

To support homes like the ones in Jammu, they need staff like a security guard/watchman to ensure safety of the girls.