

Site Visit Report

Door Step School, Pune

Date of site visit: April 24th, 2018

Visit by: Satyajit Nath (nath dot satyajit at gmail dot com), Asha Seattle chapter

Project page: www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=659

Asha supports **Door Step School (DSS)**, an NGO focused on Literacy and Primary education of the urban poor in Pune and Mumbai. The Seattle chapter supports a part of DSS activities known as **Project Foundation** in Pune. Project Foundation is a direct education program delivering daycare and education to children of workers at urban construction sites. DSS also runs three other programs in Pune: **Project Grow With Books** -- a supplemental reading program for students in government schools; **Every Child Counts (ECC)** -- a grassroots campaign among Pune's citizens to enroll children in municipal schools; and **Parents' Participation in Children's Education (PPCE)** -- a mentoring program to get construction workers more involved and responsible for their children's education.

Visit to a Project Foundation location

As in 2016, I visited a Project Foundation location at a construction site, but at a different site this time. This time it was the Gera's Park View site in Kharadi, a northeastern suburb of Pune. The builder for this specific site is Millennium Engineers & Contractors Pvt. Ltd.. The Educational Activity Center (EAC) at this site is one of 73 currently operated by DSS in various sites in the Pune area, serving 3,443 children in total.

In this visit, Mrs. Bhavana Kulkarni - Director, Asma Tamboli - Asst. Director, and Tehsin Shaikh - Supervisor, joined me from DSS. Amit Dang, Jayasankar Divakarla, and Vineet Kumar -- my colleagues, who were also in Pune for work with me, joined us as well.



Inside the EAC in the Gera's Park View site, Kharadi, Pune
(From left to right) Visitors: Satyajit Nath, Amit Dang, Jayasankar Divakarla (not in photo: Vineet Kumar)
DSS: Tehsin Shaikh, Asma Tamboli, Bhavana Kulkarni, Sangita Baikatte (EAC teacher for 6+ age children)

The builder, Millenium, has constructed a shed to comply with government requirement to provide a safe space for the children of workers living with their families at the construction site. The shed is located close to the living quarters of the workers, at a short walking distance.



*The visitors just outside the EAC (green shed behind my colleagues)
(From left to right) Amit Dang, Jayasankar Divakarla, Vineet Kumar (not in photo: Satyajit Nath)*

Working with DSS, Millenium has gone beyond the minimum government requirements to divide the shed into three rooms and also create an adjoining hallway connecting the three rooms. Electricity with lights and ceiling fans have been provided in all the rooms.

DSS uses one of the rooms as a creche for the infants, and the other two rooms for educational activities for the school-age children -- one room for *bālhwāḍī* (kindergarten classes for ages 3-6), and the other for literacy/study classes for ages 6+.



Children in the bālhwāḍī room greeting us

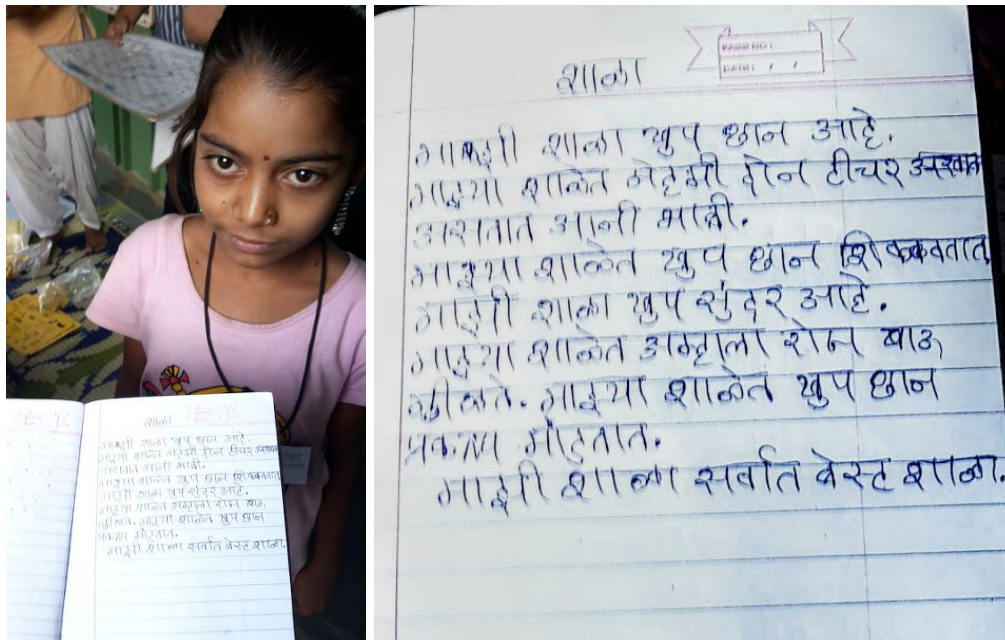
A student we met at the EAC

As we were walking through the 6+ age group class at the EAC, I saw a placard on the wall noting the relative progress of students in the Marathi reading/writing curriculum. I asked Sangita Baikatte, the teacher for that age group to introduce us to the child noted on the placard as working at the highest level -- on grammar and writing essays in Marathi, named Shivani Chaudhari. The teacher called Shivani over to meet us.

३) शिंदू मास्कर	52	बाराखडी अपूर्ण पूर्ण बाराखडी शिकवणे
४) हिनेबरी पुरे	45	बाराखडी पूर्ण आहे. जोडकर म्ह. त्या वृत्त सारखे
५) अर्जुनसिंग पंडित	27	मूळकार पूर्ण बाराखडी शिकवणे ते उपास
६) अडेजय खान	42	बाराखडी अपूर्ण कमा ते मात्रावाद शिकवणे
७) शिवानी चौधरी	28	जोडकर पूर्ण आहे. निबंध लेखन, व्याकरण सि.
८) अरुणिका चौधरी	21	बाराखडी अपूर्ण उकार, मात्रा, एक कमा
९) सूर्य चौधरी	28	बाराखडी पूर्ण जोडकरांचा सराव ठेवणे.

Marathi reading/writing progress tracking placard. Shivani's entry is the one that starts with 7) (in pink)

As with teachers we can remember from our childhood, Ms. Baikatte immediately asked Shivani to demonstrate her skill, at which point I felt very guilty to have caused this child to be put on the spot. But, without hesitation and right in front of us, Shivani took pen to paper to write a short Marathi essay about her school and why she liked it; and she did this in less than 5 minutes! After that, I do agree with Shivani with what she wrote at the end of her essay -- her school is the best of all!



Shivani displaying the Marathi essay she wrote on the spot during our visit

It was interesting to learn more about Shivani, her family, and her experience at DSS. She is 11 years old and originally from a village in rural Maharashtra about 550 km northeast of Pune. She has four siblings and both her mother and father work. In the village, her parents do farming work as laborers in farms owned by others. The family migrated in February 2018 to Pune in search of work because farming activity stops in the village in the months of February through June. Once the family reached Pune, both parents found work as construction workers in Gera's Park View site.

Shivani is the third oldest among her siblings. Her eldest sister, who is 18+, is married. The second oldest one is 15 years old. Her two younger sisters are 9 and 7 years old respectively. All the siblings, except the eldest one, were enrolled in school in their village. Shivani speaks Marathi at home.

She started at the EAC in Gera's Park View site at the end of February. Since then, she was able to attend the EAC regularly. As with other students at entry, an initial competency assessment in Marathi reading and writing was done for Shivani. At that point, she was fluent in *mātrā*-s (vowel signs) but was not able to read compound words correctly. In three months, with active teaching by DSS staff, she could fluently read paragraphs with compound words. She could also read and write small paragraphs on given topics, as she demonstrated to us. Different teaching methods, including project methods, story reading, "*joḍākṣhar sarāv pustikā*" (compound letter practice booklet) were used to enhance her reading skills with comprehension.

Since our visit, Shivani and her family have migrated back to their home village with the return of farming labor work in the village at the end of June. DSS has confirmed that she is continuing school there in class VII.

Shivani's story provides insight into the "continuity of education" service provided by DSS that is so critical for families of migrant laborers who have to move around the country in search of work to continue to earn a livelihood. It is heartening to see that Shivani not only had continuity of education in those five months she spent in the EAC, but also significantly gained core Marathi reading/writing skills that she did not have when she started at the EAC.

Her story is also indicative of the detailed and painstaking work by DSS staff to continuously track their students, both in terms of academic progress, and their location with their families as they move about in search of livelihood.

As with the 2016 site visit, we left being inspired by the students, the teachers, and the staff at DSS, and the unique approach, creative techniques, and hard work to meet the unique educational needs of the families of these construction workers.