

Site Visit Report

Door Step School, Pune

Dates of visit: July 9th and 20th, 2016

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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 for the urban poor in Pune and Mumbai. The Seattle chapter supports a part of DSS activities known as **Project Foundation**, specifically in Pune. Project Foundation is a direct education program focused on care and education of children of workers at urban construction sites. Other Asha chapters, including Asha NYC/NJ, support other activities of DSS. I did this site visit during a business trip to Pune. I also met with Mrs. Rajani Paranjpe, Founder of DSS, Mrs. Bhavana Kulkarni, Director of DSS Pune, and other DSS staff. It was an inspiring experience.

DSS office visit

I visited the DSS office in Anand Park, Pune on Saturday July 9th to meet the founder, Mrs. Rajani Paranjpe. A friend in Pune, Sunil Kelkar, and I went there. Rajani *Tai* (elder sister in Marathi), along with a member of her team, Ankita, explained the programs run by DSS.



Satyajit with Mrs. Rajani Paranjpe, founder of Door Step School, at the DSS office in Pune

In addition to Project Foundation, which I describe in more detail below, DSS runs three programs in Pune -- **Project Grow With Books**, **Every Child Counts (ECC)**, and **Parents' Participation in Children's Education (PPCE)**.

Project Grow With Books is a supplemental reading program for students in government schools. "Book fairies", who are adult volunteers in the local areas, conduct a 30-60 minute class per week, in school

classrooms. A study was conducted this year by an independent survey company, SocioQuest Solutions, using a statistically significant sample of students in classrooms where this program is implemented. The report shows a 3x increase (over [National ASER](#) levels) of percentage of class 3 students achieving high reading proficiency, after this program was implemented: ASER national average is 25%; Project Grow With Books is 75% -- a dramatic improvement!

Every Child Counts (ECC) is a grassroots campaign among Pune's citizens to enroll children in municipal schools. Only about 10% of unenrolled students in Pune are covered directly by DSS. So, this grassroots campaign is needed to involve concerned citizens to enroll more students across the city.

Parents' Participation in Children's Education (PPCE) is a mentoring program to get construction workers more involved and responsible for their children's education.

How the Project Foundation program works

The government requires builders to provide a safe space for the children, while their parents -- the construction workers -- are at work. To comply with this requirement, the builders set aside a small space within each site where the children can stay safely. However, the builders do not provide any education or childcare facilities for the children in these spaces.

For Project Foundation, DSS has negotiated with the builders to use these spaces to provide necessary schooling and childcare (creche) services to the workers' children. Schooling is for children 5 years and older. Childcare (creche) facility is for children 4 years and younger. Services are performed by DSS staff assigned to each site and go their daily. DSS currently operates in 142 Project Foundation locations across the Pune metropolitan area serving approximately 8,500 children.

Visit to a Project Foundation location

I visited a Project Foundation location in a construction site in Hinjewadi, a suburb in the northwestern part of Pune. The construction site is called Blue Ridge and has several high-rise commercial and residential buildings under construction. From DSS, Mrs. Bhavana Kulkarni - Director of DSS Pune, and Anuradha - DSS staff member, came with me. Four of my colleagues in the Pune office -- Anupam Chomal, Girish Dudhe, Sourish Banerjee, and Tejas Vaykole -- also joined us.



On the road to the Project Foundation location in Hinjewadi

Neighborhood of the visited Project Foundation location

After reaching the Blue Ridge site, we walked past the living quarters of the workers and their families. The accommodation for a worker's family is either a RCC room or a tin shed. The RCC rooms were allotted to workers with longer experience and employment with the builder.



Walking past the general living quarters of the construction workers at the Blue Ridge site



About to enter the Project Foundation location (white tin shed straight ahead)

The builder has constructed a tin shed to comply with the government requirement to provide a safe space for the workers' children. It is very close walking distance from the living quarters of the workers. The shed has no doors but is divided into two rooms with an open doorway in between the two rooms. The builder has provided electricity with lights and ceiling fans in both rooms. DSS uses the smaller room as a creche, and the other room for schooling activities for the older children.

The creche in the Project Foundation location

When we visited, there were 5 children in the creche room, supervised by one DSS staff member. The children were engaged in playing with educational toys that were appropriate for their age.



Interacting with the children in the creche

I noticed that the DSS staff member kept track of each child and interacted 1:1 with each child by turn. Bhavna Tai explained that the daily program in the creche is carefully planned by the staff outside of class hours. DSS staff members also receive training on how to supervise the children.



A poster in the creche with the day-by-day plan of educational activities for the week

The school in the Project Foundation location

The larger room in the shed is used for school activities for the older children, i.e. 5 years old and older. While we were present, two classes were being held concurrently -- one for younger children (5-8 years old) and the other for the older children. DSS teachers manage both classes in the same room.



The school room -- left: teacher with children 5-8 years old; right: older children's class



Older children's part of the school room -- one child leading the rest in oral multiplication tables

Teaching and learning materials, such as posters for arithmetic tables and many other skills, are a key part of the educational methodology. This is important because it helps the teacher manage the curriculum, but also, and more importantly, because those materials help the children reinforce the learning on their own.

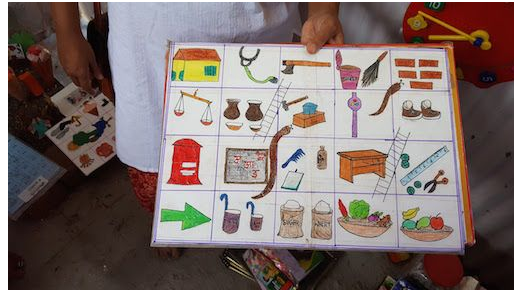
Just like in the creche, the teachers spend a lot of time outside class hours detailing out the teaching plan in detail, and keeping careful records of the progress of individual children as they try to learn the material.

Some other observations

Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM): One striking thing about the school is the extensive use of teaching and learning materials, such as posters, games, stories, and toys. What is even more interesting is that all the TLM used in the classroom were conceptualized and made by the DSS teachers themselves. Creating the materials themselves gives the teachers an opportunity to create TLM tailored for their own students. Additionally, it gives them a sense of ownership that would be absent if the material were made elsewhere and just handed to them. These motivations were consciously taken into account by DSS before taking this approach to have their own TLM. The following photographs show many of the unique TLM used at the Blue Ridge site.

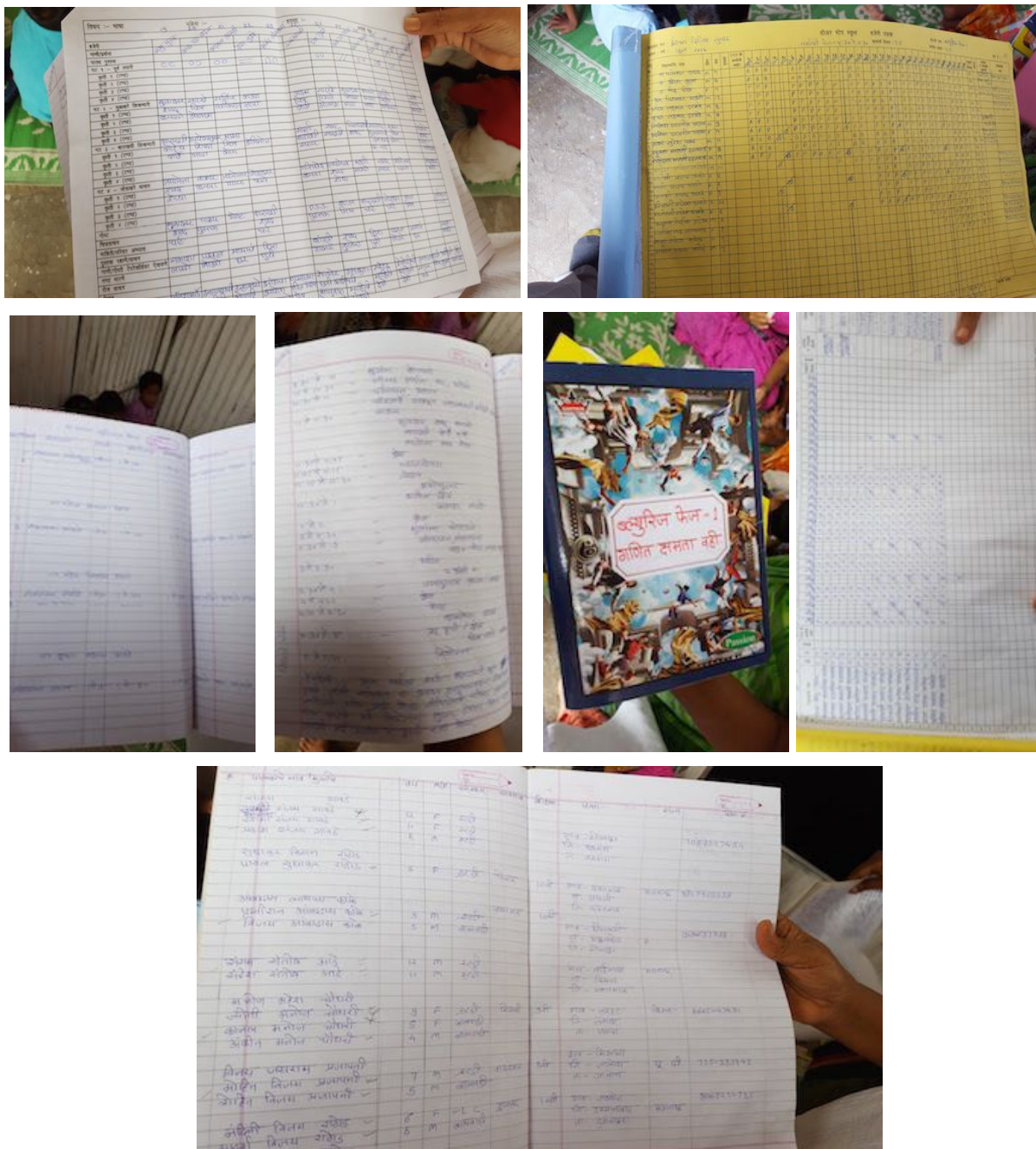


Some of the teaching and learning material used in the Blue Ridge site



More teaching and learning material used in the Blue Ridge site

Careful project planning and record keeping: Another remarkable thing about the school is the level of planning visible in the creche and schooling activities and careful record keeping of students' progress through the week and year. Teachers had daily, weekly, and monthly plans for material to be covered in class, and noted down student performance in extensive notes. What was also really inspiring to hear is that teachers spend several hours outside of school and creche time to create these records. DSS staff in the main office periodically enter the data noted in these paper logs into computers for DSS to gather statistics and evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching methods and materials.



Project planning and student performance logs in the Blue Ridge site

[illegible]

An interesting moment: Midway through the site visit, a teenage girl came in with a baby cradled on her waist. She talked to the DSS teacher for a minute, handed her a notebook and left. When I asked, I learned that she was a student at that location and the baby was her brother who was sick that day. So, she stayed home to take care of her brother. But, she still did her assignment and stopped by so that she could hand it over to her teacher on time. That was dedication in action!



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End of the visit to the Project Foundation location

At the end, as we discussed with Bhavana Tai and Anuradha from DSS, the overall feeling for all five of us visiting was how much can be achieved with how little money, with intelligence, careful planning, and diligent execution. From the outside, the location would be ignored as one more little tin shed in the construction site. But due to the efforts of DSS, the children of construction workers were getting care and a decent education there that uniquely caters to the migrant lives of their parents.



L-R: Anuradha, Bhavana Tai, Anupam (me in his place in right pic), Girish, Sourish and Tejas



Left: Blue Ridge building complex; right: Project Foundation location as seen from those buildings

As we re-entered the rarefied corporate environment of the Pune office of the company we work in, we realized how fortunate each one of us was to have received a decent education to make something of ourselves on the strength of that education. My colleagues, who are Pune residents, pledged to continue working with this Project Foundation location at the “doorstep” of their office, and volunteer in other activities of DSS as well.