

Site Visit Report

Doorstep School, Pune

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I was finally lucky to be able to visit Doorstep this winter and meet Bina Lashkari, the founder of the Doorsteps Project. Doorstep has expanded their operations in Pune and I visited their Pune operations. Also visiting the project on that day was Dr. Mashelkar, Director, CSIR.

In the morning, 9.30am I met the Doorsteps Bus at the Chaturshringi Mandir, Pune. They conduct a two-hour session 5 days a week for labourers/workers children. There was 1 lady who co-ordinates the Doorsteps-Pune activities, 2 teachers, Bina, Dr. Mashelkar, the driver of the van (forgot his name) and me.

After the class, we drove to the other project location managed by DS-Pune in Dattawadi, Pune. Along the way, the two teachers talked about difficulties and successes they encountered when teaching the kids. The main difficulty was that of "children-retention" which they said has slowly diminished over the months. The kids feel a strong sense of belonging with the teachers and the bus that they keep coming without having to use coercion. I asked them about the location in a temple.....to that they answered that it was a vantage and easily accessible location. Though class was held in temple premises, it was nowhere close to the temple (the temple is on top of a hillock, while the school is held close to the parking lot at the bottom, where the bus stands). The teachers said that often they get food donations from temple devotees and patrons, which are politely declined as they strictly enforce their non-religious alliance.

We then reached the other Project in Dattawadi. Here is an active school being conducted in a 3 room campus. There are approximately 30 students ranging from ages 7-11. I forgot to ask whether these were only the elder kids and maybe there was a similar class of younger kids that assembled in the morning. All of these kids live in poor and lower income housing in and around the Dattawadi area. The school area was neat and tidy and so were the students. There are 4 active teachers along with the bus driver who works as the "peon/hands-on-man" at this location. There were 3 computers that were recently donated -? by a patron. These will be brought actively into operation soon.

There is a strong network of people who volunteer and support these projects to ensure that they work successfully. They want to expand and have the potential to do so required they get the adequate funds. They have a lot of human resources that they are utilizing well. I was very impressed and could see that Dr. Mashelkar was extremely impressed as well. The children interacted with him well and his positive feedback came as a big boost, especially considering that he is amongst India's foremost scientists today.

All in all, Doorsteps-Pune is doing well and is definitely making a positive impact in childrens lives in those two areas of Pune City.