A recurring feature of my trips to India in the last few years has been a visit to Sandnya Sanwardhan Sanstha. Unfortunately this year my visit coincided with Diwali vacation so I did not get to meet the children or staff, but I got to meet some students working in the vocational unit. Also, part of purpose of the visit was to check on the progress of construction of additional classrooms, which was left halfway during my previous visit for lack of funds. After seeing the construction being stalled, Asha Athens, which is the funding chapter for this project since 2006, decided to submit a proposal for raising funds for financing the cost of construction through the Work-an-Hour 2011 campaign. We managed to raise nearly $6000 through the campaign, which ended in October 2011. These funds are expected to be delivered to the project in Jan 2012.

Before I provide more updates on the construction, I must mention that I was highly impressed by the success of the Star Circlip vocational unit, which now has expanded to 8 students. As the reader may recollect, Star Circlip is a locally based company that focuses on manufacturing and exporting circlips to Germany. Start Circlip supports the institute by providing employment to some of the older mentally, challenged students who otherwise are unable to compete in an open job market. Since the institute wanted to make sure its students are treated well and work conditions are better, they wanted the work to be done on the institute campus. This presented a challenge because Star Circlip was bound by contract to not remove any raw material from its premises and the company had to obtain permission from its clients to make this happen. The company pays the students for the finished work based on the weight of the finished clips (a per kilo basis). Sandnya does the work of training each recruit, and it takes about 3 months for one mentally challenged student to become proficient in his or her work.

pic 1. The star circlip unit in operation
pic 2. Tracking progress of work
Coming back to the state of construction, I’d say about 80% is complete. Six new classrooms have been added on the ground floor (pic 3 below) and a big hall on the first floor along with additional toilets and additional flight of stairs.

The institute demolished their oldest structures the temporary hut like structures that were being used as classrooms from the time they moved into this campus many years ago. The institute has sizeable number of students who have physical disability in addition to mental disability. Keeping that in mind, a new ramp was added (pic 4 below) to ease the movement of wheelchair bound students, as they need to be helped out of the school bus and into the classrooms each morning. The institute is also in the process of getting an elevator installed too (pic 5 below) so that these students can gain easier access to classrooms and hall on the upper floor. A company based in Chennai donated the elevator to the institute. Institute needs to bear the cost of installation.
While I was impressed by the progress made on infrastructure by the institute, there was more that I hadn’t seen yet. The institute also managed to secure a power generator as a donation from a generous donor and the generator was functional on the day of my visit since there was an ongoing power cut. Generators or inverters are becoming quite necessary and have become ubiquitous across India due to frequent power cuts, not many schools are able to afford one. Another new addition was covering of an existing play area by constructing a shed so that the children remain protected from sun during peak afternoon hours.
With the addition of classrooms, the institute is now able to accommodate 17 students who were waitlisted for lack of capacity in the school building. The student strength of the institute now stands at 100. While there is enough classroom capacity to add more students, the school buses now present a constraint. There are only 2 school buses and both are running over capacity since they ferry both children and staff. Therefore the prime need of the institute at this moment is addition of a school bus. For the last few months the school has been on a drive to secure donations for a new bus.

Overall, I was satisfied by the progress made by the school on infrastructure front. Given the constraints the institute faces it still remarkably manages to maintain its pace of development and fundraise for its needs while still continuing to do a great job at student development.

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Akshay Bhole
Volunteer, Asha for Education
akshay [dot] bhole [at] gmail [dot] com

Additional Resources
Complete picture gallery for site visit 2011
https://picasaweb.google.com/102862574956231304927/SandnyaVisit2011
Site Visit 2010
Site Visit 2008

Feel free to send any comments/feedback to my email id.