Note – This is my second site visit to this project. So I’m going to be quite brief and provide updates only on how and what things have changed/are changing at the institute. To gain a complete perspective on how the institute functions on a day-to-day basis, please read the report on my earlier visit to the project. http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/686/Sandnya_visit_2008.doc

Expansion
The institute has been supporting around 80 children for many years now. While they’ve wanted to expand (they’ve had a waiting list of about 50 students) limited resources has been their biggest hindrance. However, things are about to change in this department. The institute managed to secure some funding for expanding the existing school building, and six new classrooms are being constructed. The institute was hoping to have the classrooms ready by July 2010 so that they could increase their student intake from the next session. However, the construction work is currently stalled for lack of funds. The pictures below will give a fair idea of the progress of the construction work and how much more remains to be done.

pic1. Construction of additional classrooms in progress
pic2. The passage that will eventually connect into the existing building (left portion of the pic)

pic3. Another view of the construction work.
With these classrooms ready, the older sheds (which were more like a temporary structure) will be discontinued from further use. I’d be glad to see that happen since the sheds used to get rather hot during summers making it very uncomfortable to conduct classes there. When the classroom expansion happens the institute should be able to allow some more students from their long wait list to be admitted. However, this brings up another hurdle. The institute is bit further away from the city and has been using two school buses to ferry the children and staff. One of the school buses was funded by Asha Silicon Valley few years ago. The school buses already run at full capacity. So there is a need for an additional school bus and the institute is looking for a source of funding for it.

Modernization
Through their tireless efforts of looking at multiple sources of funding and resources, the institute managed to get an elevator as a donation from one of the elevator manufacturing companies. This will be installed on premises during the ongoing construction work of new classrooms. This is a great relief for the institute and its students, many of who suffer from physical disabilities in addition to their existing mental conditions. Until now, children with acute physical disabilities had to be carried upstairs/downstairs by the non-teaching staff multiple times a day.

Rehabilitation Units
For most adolescents or adults with mental disabilities rehabilitation is a challenge because of the constant and detailed supervision and support needed from normal people. Doing their regular day-to-day activity is a challenge and even more difficult is the task of teaching them to earn their own bread. However, doing that is necessary because most students coming into this institute are from a poor socio-economic background, the institute has come up with innovative ways to ensure many of its students find employment. The institute takes advantage of the fact that it is located in an industrial area.

There are many small industries nearby with which the institute has developed good relations over the years. These often used to translate into recurring donations from the industries. Now they’ve taken it a step further by taking up some of their work that is done on premises. A small metal clip unit operates from one classroom where 4-5 older students who have a borderline, mild or moderate mental disability work under supervision of their special educator. They are able to do simple work of attaching couple of pieces of metal strips together and bending them into the desired shape using simple tools. The institute arranges for finished products to be delivered back to the industry in the neighborhood. Some students who need more supervision and therefore not allowed to handle sharp metal objects and tools work on an improvised charka unit that occupies part of a big hall on the second floor of the building. They have a weaving machine in the unit too which consumes the thread from the charka units. I did not get a chance to see the weaving machine in operation during my visit but I saw the finished product (a small mat). The oldest unit they’ve had is the screen-printing and file-binding unit which has been in operation for many years. The students working on these units earn and keep the income earned from these activities. The institute does not retain any part of the income.
Pic4. Metal Clip unit

Pic5. Students working on improvised charkha
While these activities have been running successfully, there have been failures with some other activities they’ve tried in the past. They had a small demo store selling daily need goods where they tried to train students on operating a store, collecting and counting cash etc (the institute teaches currency identification as a part of its curriculum in one of the lower grades. Read more about it in the Site Visit Report for 2008). Another activity was trying to grow vegetables in a small patch of land on the institute premises. This activity perhaps lasted for less than a year and eventually that land was needed for expansion of the school building (which is currently underway)

The institute wishlist (higher priority items first)
- Additional funds needed for completing the construction work
- Will need an additional school bus after the extra classrooms are functional and the institute increases its intake from the waitlisted students
- The physiotherapy & training equipment is quite old and rusty. Needs replacement.

Thanks
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Please feel free to direct any questions/comments to my email ID.