

# PROJECT WHY SITE VISIT

| JUNE 14, 2022 |

I visited Project WHY on June 14. I met with Rani and Shamika at Mrs. Anouradha Bakshi's house. I got lost on the way and arrived late so I wasn't able to have much of a chat with Mrs. Bakshi but what I did learn I've included below. I visited the first two sites with Ms. Rani and Ms. Shamika and visited the last two with Mr. Dharmender.

- Katie Harrison

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## Meeting with Mrs. Bakshi

Project WHY is now bouncing back to its normal state after the COVID lockdowns have passed and families are returning to their normal lives. As a result of missed school time, children who were not ready to move on were pushed into their next grade levels anyway and are now struggling to keep up. Children have also been dealing with mental health issues as a result of lockdowns. Project WHY is working to help students in these two regards.

## Giri Nagar Centre

We first visited the Giri Nagar Center. It is a two-story building which houses the primary school grades on the bottom floor and the secondary school grades on the top floor. They have 100 students total (grades 1-12) and have just 4 teachers for these children, 1 for primary and 3 for secondary. They would like to hire 2 more teachers. They struggle to hire primary teachers because it is difficult to find well-qualified teachers.

When I visited, the primary students were working in groups according to age level and the secondary students were also in groups (I believe according to age level) and were working on maths. The school has students come in two shifts (of 50 students each) because they cannot fit all students in the school at once.

Giri Nagar is also directly addressing students' mental health needs. Most schools do not have school counseling services available and students who need help are often being missed. The director of Giri Nagar showed me a document from a recent teacher training workshop which highlighted signs and symptoms of mental health issues they may observe in children or may know about the child's family, and ways that teachers can reach out and try to help children.

At Giri Nagar they teach maths, English, science, social studies, Hindi, art, and Sanskrit.

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Primary

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Secondary



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### **Govind Puri (not visited, only spoke about)**

Govind Puri offers free stitching sewing lessons for anybody who would like to learn. It is attended by local women and they earn a certification upon completion. They can go on to open their own businesses or to work for a sewing shop.

Govind Puri also has classes for special needs people. Before lockdown they had about 10 students, aged 5-50 years. Post-COVID they have had enrollment slowly recovering. Some parents lost their jobs or moved during the lockdowns, so they lost some of their previous students. They teach speech, occupational/vocational skills, social skills, basic computers, basic academic skills, and cleaning skills. The students also get a lunch and go for outings. Rani and Shamika shared that it is difficult to find Special Education teachers because they ask for a high salary.

### **Okhla**

Okhla is primarily serving families who work in the factories, which are 2 km away. They have 385 students total, with students working in groups according to grade level. The primary students were located on the ground floor and the secondary students were on the top floor. About 70% of their post-10<sup>th</sup> students go on to university, primarily the male students. When students pass out of 10<sup>th</sup> standard, Okhla finds out which stream the students have chosen/been placed into and hire teachers accordingly.

Okhla also has a small computer center with a curriculum centered around building hard and soft computer skills. Students learn basic programs like Word and Powerpoint, as well as Photoshop and web design. They can also learn about building computers. Students can go on to work in MNCs.

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Primary



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Secondary



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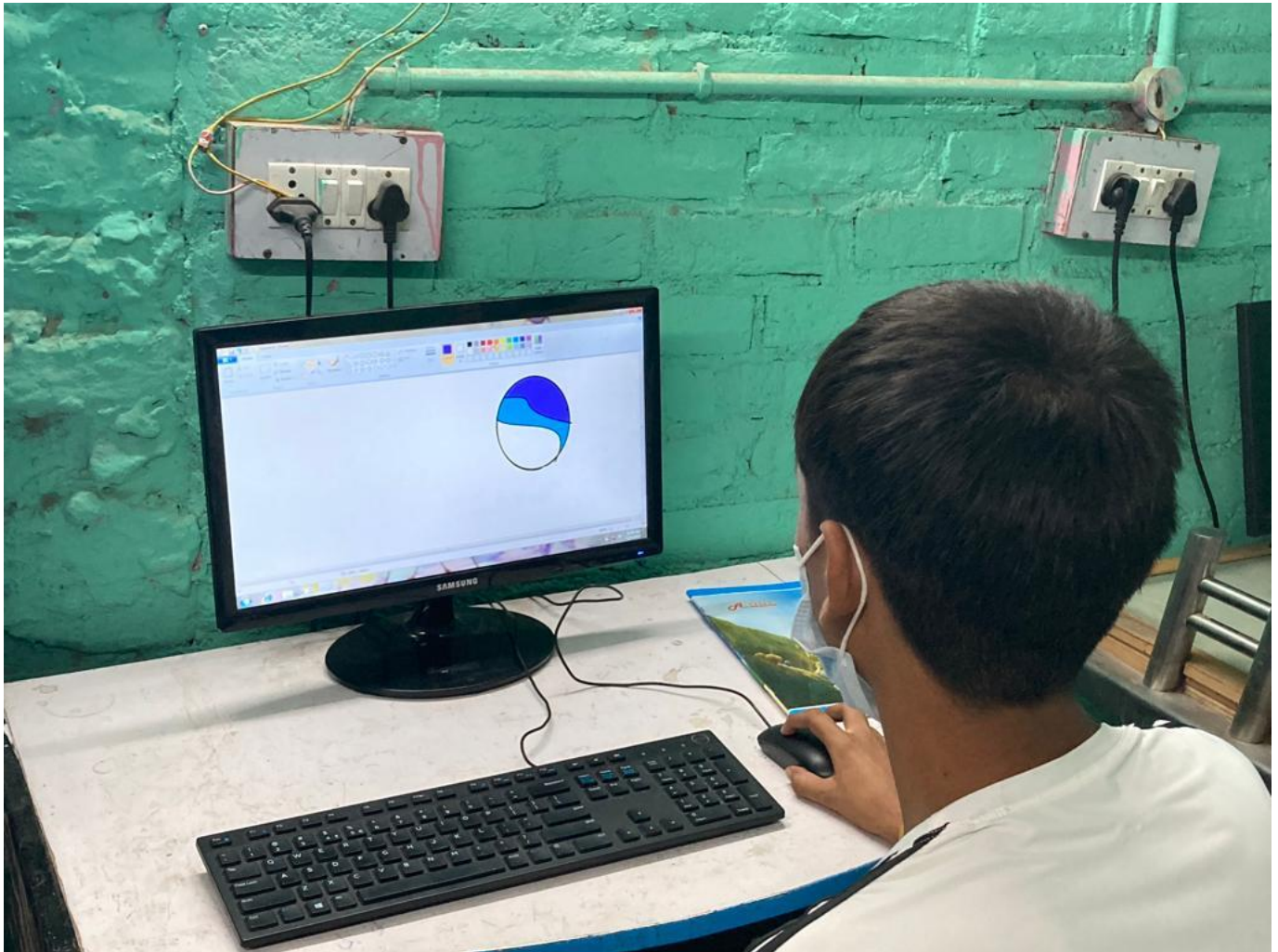
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Secondary

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Computer Center

### Yamuna

Yamuna is a beautiful school set in the flood plains of the Yamuna River, right outside of the Delhi city limits. A population of 200 migrant families live there and work the land as farmers. The school has a relaxed atmosphere and was constructed of natural materials. It does suffer from the elements and needs repairs annually. Every 3-4 years it needs major reconstruction. Its open-air atmosphere also poses difficulties for students as it can be quite cold in the winters.

The students were separated in the primary and secondary groups. The primary students are the majority, with about 46 at present. There are about 20 secondary students and when I visited, I think only about 10 were at school.



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that day. Speaking with these secondary students, their career goals were to be: teachers (most), policemen, and one scientist. They seemed very enthusiastic and dedicated to their studies.

Students are served a lunch at Yamuna and the elder students help in its distribution. The lunch is provided each day as a donation from a well-known restaurant, and it was quite good I have to say.

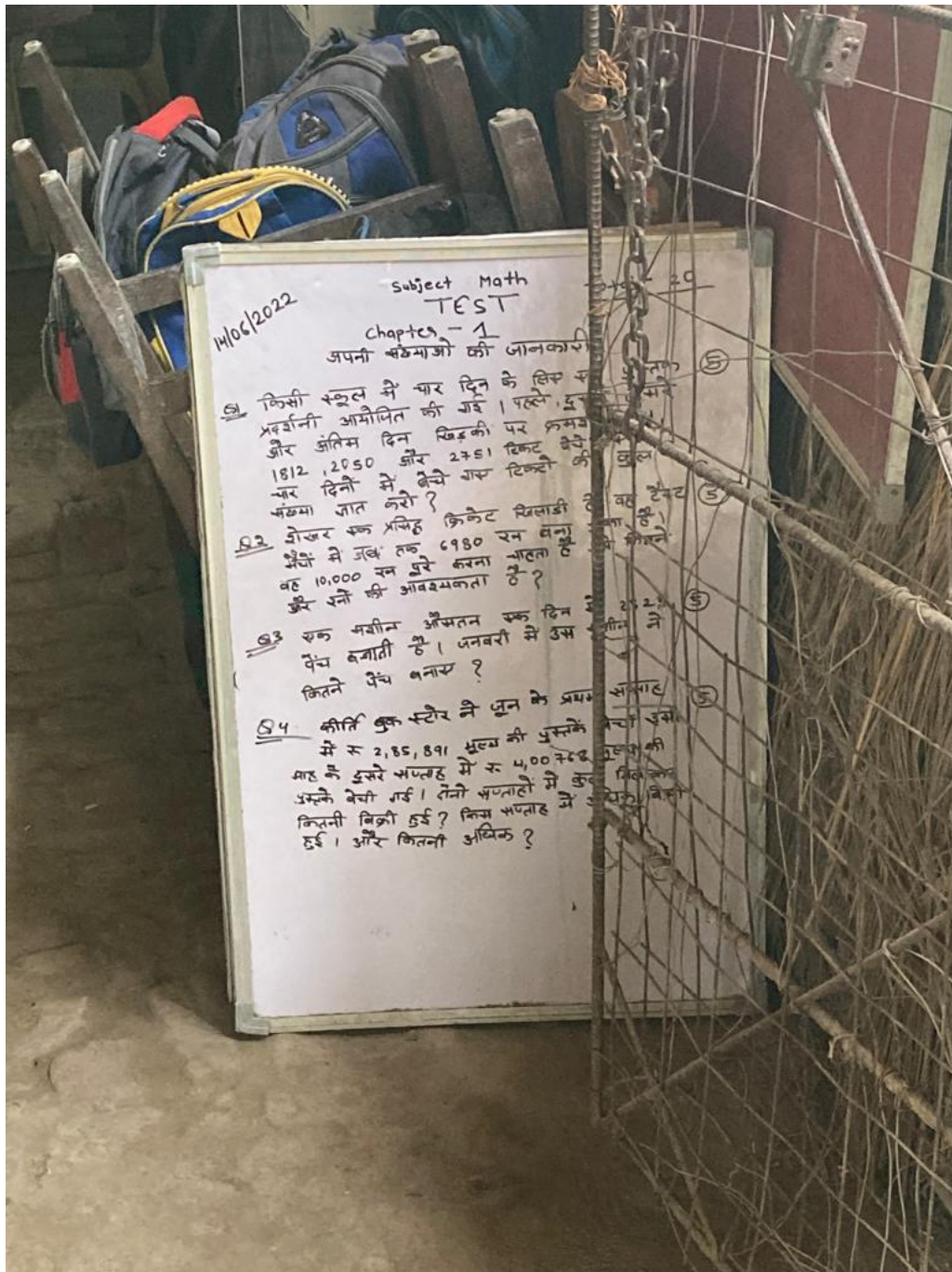
The school director Mr. Dharmender spoke to me about the philosophy of the school and his approach to teaching. He said that they use modern and traditional teaching modes in the classroom, including puzzles, games, textbooks, and recitation. He said his goal is to find a happy medium between parents' expectations (a more traditional schooling style) and modern information about best practices in education.

During COVID, Project WHY was the only group which was distributing food to the families living on the Yamuna flood plains. Because they are there in unregistered settlements, they did not receive rations from the Delhi or UP distributions.



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### Women's Center

At the women's center I saw a stitching class with about 10 women present at that time. The stitching program is a 6-month course and participants earn a certification upon completion. They have 64 students at present and have closed their admission. They have a waiting list for other interested women.

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I also saw several classrooms at The Women's Center with school-aged children. They have primary and secondary students but at the moment they have fewer than their normal number of primary students because many families haven't put their children back in school after COVID, or they may have moved away. At present, they have 163 secondary students and 78 primary students. They put time and resources into recruiting girls at the school and they have 164 girls and 121 boys there at present.

At The Women's Center I also met the extraordinary Aman Sharma who has been present at previous site visits. He is a young man who attended Project WHY and gained admission in the Fine Arts program at Delhi University.



Stitching Class