

Adruta Home Site Visit Report

Palani Sundaramurthy: Dec 4 2017 through Dec 6 2017
Covering Bhubaneswar and Angul children homes

I visited Adruta Children Home during my trip to India in December 2017. I have been the steward for this project since Asha Seattle chapter started supporting the project in 2006. More details about Asha's involvement with the project can be found at <http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=746>

Background

Adruta Home was started in 1992 as a center that cared for the abandoned and destitute girl children in the state of Orissa. The center's mission is to educate, nurture and develop these children by providing balanced nutrition, quality education and all-round development in a healthy, safe and loving environment.

Currently Adruta Home has roughly 450 children, mostly girls, in 10 centers across the state (Bhubaneswar, Rayagada, Bolangir, Sundergarh, Keonjhar, Baripada, Angul, Dhenkanal, Puri and Cuttack). During this trip I visited the homes in Bhubaneswar and Angul.

In 2013 and 2016, the children from Adruta Home visited Seattle and performed in several events, including Odissi dance events and Asha Seattle 25th anniversary donor gala. As a result, they have had a chance to bond closely with many of the Seattle chapter volunteers over the years.

Observations: Day 1

I reached Bhubaneswar in the evening of Dec 4 2017, where I received by Dr. Sagarika Misra, the principal of the Bhubaneswar home. When I arrived some of the girls were studying (including some tutors) and others were practicing dance. They were quite excited to see me after a few years.

The home was very well maintained. Some of the things that were new since my last visit:

- New solar panel and electric generator. This is very useful because the power cuts in the area are frequent and the power bills are also pretty expensive.
- There was a beautiful outdoor stage constructed on the grounds. This was a recent donation and it serves them well for dance and other events
- The outdoor garden had been expanded with a lot of vegetable crops like pumpkin and fruit crops banana
- There were more cows in their on-site cowshed, which provides fresh milk to the home daily

The very next morning, I woke up early to join the children on their meditation (starts at 5am). After meditation, the children were off to take care of their morning routines. The kitchen serves them breakfast. Many of the children were doing their homework and studying for their class in the morning.

Then children go to different nearby schools (English and Odiya medium) and some of the older ones even go to colleges. These schools start at different times and the children are transported by the vans/cars in the home. This was a really busy time.

It was great to see the children, even the really young ones, take on responsibility at a very young age. They eat, bathe, clothe, comb each other's hair, pack their food to school, wash their dishes, and generally help out each other with very little adult supervision.

The children take great pride in caring of their garden and cowshed.

There were 76 children at the Bhubaneswar home at the time of my visit. Here are some pictures:



Figure 1: Solar Panel at the home



Figure 2: Pumpkin patch



Figure 3: Banana plants



Figure 4: Organic garden



Figure 5: Front view of the home



Figure 6: Children practice Odissi and folk dance almost daily



Figure 7: Well-maintained garden



Figure 8: Cowshed



Figure 9: Store room



Figure 10: Kitchen



Figure 11: New outdoor stage

Observations: Day 2

The next day, we left for the home in Angul, which is a roughly 130km from Bhubaneswar and houses 36 girls and 45 boys in the facility. This home is a newer facility constructed with grants from the community mining companies like Jindal Steel.

When I visited the home in the morning, most of the older children were in school. The younger kids who were at home had a fun time posing for photos and checking out the camera. The home was very clean and the children seemed happy and playful.

The Angul home has a much larger organic garden. It also houses the solar panel that was supported by donations from Asha Seattle in 2017.

On my way back, I met a boy from the home who was the State level gold medalist in long jump. He was shy and on his way back from school. I was informed that he was also a good student in his classroom.



Figure 12: My favorite picture from the trip. The girl is hugging a toddler



Figure 13: Solar panel donated by Asha Seattle



Figure 14: Large organic garden



Figure 15: Bunk beds at the boys' home



Figure 16: Girls and Boys home



Figure 17: Girls home



Figure 18: Meet the long-distance champ



Figure 19: Young one getting her lunch



Figure 20: Kids fooling around



Figure 21: What happens when kids take over the camera Part 1



Figure 22: What happens when kids take over the camera Part 2



Figure 23: What happens when kids take over the camera Part 3



Figure 24: Store room

Conclusion

Overall, I enjoyed my stay at Adruta Home and am amazed to see the difference it has made in the lives of so many children. They have now come a very long way in being able to overcome their disadvantaged pasts and dream of a better future. Here are some highlights of the changes I could observe:

- Many of the children excel in academics. I met several girls who are top of their class and aspire to be doctors, engineers, lawyers and IAS officers. They looked eager to succeed.
- The children have made the best of their exposure to arts, dance and music by excelling in Odissi and other dance forms. They have been invited to perform in international-level dance events in India and abroad. Every year they travel to different countries. This has given them tremendous exposure and confidence. It has also helped them find a new pool of international donors.
- I have seen a lot of improvement in non-academic career opportunities made available to the children. During my previous visits, I always felt that this was an area for improvement. The children are being groomed to take up vocational training in tailoring and home sciences. Also, some of the children are exploring long-term career options in art, pottery painting and dance. Several people mentioned that the tailoring outfits (sweaters etc.), painted pots and Pathachitra paintings were selling well and opening up new sources of revenue for the home
- The dedication of the staff is amazing. They selflessly work to provide a better livelihood for the children. What's even more noteworthy is how they have been able to replicate best practices across the different centers. They have been successful in training a good second rung of leadership, who are then able to sustain high quality atmosphere across the various centers even as they have seen a rapid increase in the number of children supported since 2006
- They are able to gain the support of the local community, which is critical for their long-term success and growth. The community has seen the impact of the work done and are able to chip in with financial and moral support

Areas for Growth

The progression of Adruta was never planned. Prof. Mohanty never turned down the opportunity to care for any abandoned child. Over the years, there has been a significant growth in the number of children and centers, primary because of the reputation it has earned in the community and the state. The home has won several state and national awards and is considered a model home for the state. As a result, police officers, doctors, collectors and administrative officials routinely send the abandoned girls to the Adruta centers. However, the growth in steady funding sources has not kept up (the ad-hoc funding is not reliable for the long-term). This has imposed a serious financial strain on the limited resources. In addition, Prof. Mohanty has taken several personal loans to tide over difficult financial situations over the years – which carry a lot of interest. Clearing off these loans and maintaining a healthy corpus fund is critical to meet untoward emergency and also remove the stress of constantly needing to find new sources of funds to make ends meet.

Adruta definitely needs to make itself financial stable. Finding long-term donors and finding other sources of revenue (e.g. funds from sale of handicrafts) will be essential. They need help with PR and social media outreach for support outside the local communities. In addition, Adruta also needs a strong second-level of leadership to carry Prof. Mohanty's vision forward to the next generation as they seek to replicate their model across the state.