

Site Visit Report to Seva Mandir's Kaya Rural Training Centre - Udaipur - May 21st, 2017

My name is Ashima Goyal Siraj and I was asked to visit Seva Mandir's Rural Bridging Schools project by Naheed Quisar for Asha Danbury chapter. This site visit to Seva Mandir's Kaya Rural Training Centre (hereafter referred to as Kaya) was done on 21st May 2017. The Rural bridge school camp project is currently run from that centre. The camp is located 22 kms from Udaipur where Seva Mandir has its head quarters. We left Udaipur at 9am and reached the centre at around 9:30. I was accompanied by Mrs. Premlata who has been with Seva Mandir for the last 26 years and is looking at this project from the last 4 years.

The project started in 2001. There are 3 camps in a year of 2 months each. These are residential camps with a break of 15 days between 1st and 2nd and of a month between the 2nd and the 3rd. The camp caters to 5 blocks, covering villages as far as 120kms.

The camps are intended for out-of-school tribal children from 6 to 14 years of age (dropouts as well as those who don't have a school access). The goal is to bridge the knowledge of the children such that they can again join regular school. That is also the reason why the camps end in June just in time for the children to apply for the new academic session which begins in July.

Currently the 3rd camp of this year was being run. This batch started with 118 students in the 1st camp November 2016 and now there are 100. 18 students dropped out of various reasons. There is a 50:50 ratio of girls and boys. There are 12 teachers and each class has 8-12 students each ensuring a good teacher:student ratio. At the beginning of the first camp there is an assessment test and the children are divided into 3 levels - A, B, and C. At the end of 1st camp, there is again an assessment and based on its results, the levels might change for the next camp. Usually in the 1st camp, most children start at level C and few at B. Over the next two camps they move to higher levels.

The curriculum of the camp includes Hindi, English, Mathematics, Computer Science, arts & crafts, and sports. They use a lot of experiential learning methods and games. Though 21st May was a Sunday which is usually a free day for children, regular classes were held for the morning half, for the purpose of this visit. I interacted with children of all levels and at most of

the classrooms. The children, of course knowing about the visit, were excited and thankfully not too annoyed with having classes on a Sunday!

Every child has a file with all his/ her worksheets and assessments in it. Since the groups are mixed ages, there is also learning from each other than just one way through the teacher. The teachers have a weekly meeting to discuss children's progress and address any issue they may be facing. Weaker children are often grouped together separately and given extra attention. Below are some of my observations from my interaction with students in different classes:

Art & Craft

The activity room is the space where the children learn various arts and crafts and it also doubles as a library. This was the first class we started with. That day they were making paper flower. Some of the children were also interacting in English, although very limited. At the end of the visit, I again went into the activity room. The children had finished making their paper bouquets and were now playing board games like Aksharit (Hindi Scrabble).

Hindi:

I interacted with level C in this class. They were having a story reading session and some of the children read the story out loud for me. I asked them question relating characters from the story to real life and they were able to relate and answer. The teacher was using the story to introduce new words, sounds and sentence construction.

Mathematics:

I interacted with level B in this class. Here the children were playing a team game of number digit and word recognition and also basic operations. (Please see the video uploaded). Both the teachers and the kids were very engaged in the game and since it was team game there was a lot of excitement in the room.

English

I interacted with level A children in this class. The children were making posters of word chains (every subsequent word would start with the last letter of the previous word) in teams.

Some children were very shy and though they were doing the activity, they could not explain it to me. But when I asked them to tell me words with different letters, they were answering.

Computer Science

The class here was again level A. The kids had already typed a small paragraph in hindi. When we arrived, they typed in another sentence. Then I asked them if they could make a drawing and they all opened paintbrush and while some used set shapes, some were able to draw and colour free hand on the application. The teacher told me that most kids can open, create and save a file, type in hindi, and draw. They can also tell the parts of a computer.

The teachers

The teachers usually come from the same villages as the children as it helps if the teacher also knows the local dialect the children are most comfortable with. Before every camp, there is a short training for teachers as well. The teachers also stay in the camp during the 2 months and are also the wardens.

Currently, there are also 2 volunteers who come to teach English. One is a student from Germany and other is from Udaipur.

Other facilities:

Doctor's visit:

Every Thursday a doctor comes for regular check up. There is a medical card for every child which has information about any condition that he/she may have and if there is any medication.

There are also special sessions for girls and boys separately to talk about puberty, hygiene, and menstruation.

Mess:

There is a common mess which can fit about 100 kids at the same time. There are 4 meals in a day - breakfast, lunch, snacks and dinner. The menu is decided both on the basis of nutrition and what the children would like. The children receive milk every day and fruits once every week.

Sports:

There is a *kuchcha* ground with volleyball nets and basket. The sports teacher comes thrice a week to teach volleyball, basket ball, kho-kho, kabaddi and other sports.

Entertainment

3 times a week, the children are allowed to watch a movie/ kids program at night.

Beyond the camp

One of the most common reasons for children not joining school after the camp is that they need to work to contribute to family income. To address the problem, Seva Mandir started giving a small scholarship to children who would stay in school after the camp. Field workers also regularly keep a track of children's progress in school. This program really helped keeping the children in school but will soon be discontinued due to lack of funding.

Premlata ji told me that after the 3 consecutive camps, around 70% of children go to regular schools. 50% of the level A students get admission in grade 6 while most other go in grade 4 or 5 depending on their knowledge.

In the Kaya camp, it was a delight to see smiling kids in the camp. During these 6 months, the kids are only learning and having fun. The way childhood should be. Little girls are not helping their mothers in the kitchen or taking care of a younger sibling, boys are not doing daily labour work at some site. They are sleeping well, eating well and learning well. Whether they continue their education or not, they learn a lot in these camps and that knowledge will stand by them at all times.

I think Asha should support the project. If any more information is required, I will be happy to answer or forward the question to the concerned person within the organisation.

Link for photos: <https://goo.gl/photos/igkQdX8v1xLViGtv8>

Best Regards,

Ashima