**Site visit 2011**
I met with Ms. Suneeti Sharangpani, convenor of the Swadhar Asha project, on 12/14/11 to visit. Accompanying me were my sister Shweta Pai Povaiah and another Asha Chicago volunteer Unmesh Jadhav. The location of the site is in Kakade vasti in Pune, in the Somnathnagar area.
We also met with Ms. Sangeeta Lokre and Ms. Chandrakal Paleli at the centre for training adolescent and adult women, and then walked to the Balwadi which was a 1/4 mile away approximately, from this centre.

Balwadi:
At the Balwadi, there are 25-27 children, typically 15 present on any day. On the day of our visit there were 26 present. The balwadi serves in a community which has 1500 families. The community is very sensitive during comunal tension.and the balwadi is closed if such situations arise. At this time with the elcations impending the parents might begin to receive favours from local politicians. At the time of the visit, new roads, and other community needs were being addressed.
The teacher at this facility is Ms. Pooja Kamble. Her aide was on leave the day we visited. The children were in the middle of a language lesson when we visited. Except for a few shy children they were  all very eager to answer questions. Their set up is one front room where they have the lessons and a back room that holds teaching tools and water. This facility is rented out for Rs 1,800/month.There is a bathroom outside, immediately next door that their teacher takes them to at a scheduled time. They attend between 11 AM to 1 PM and are dropped off by their parents. The children are typically in the 3-6 age group.
They are provided dry snacks daily and a record of this and their attendance is maintained. Teachers follow weekly plans that they establish on the Saturday preceding the school week when all the Akshardhara teachers meet. They assemble occasionally to watch stories on DVD at the adult centre and the centre is working on procuring more educational DVDs from Akshardeep.
Community lectures eg on HIV, trash disposal w/ NGO "Swacha" have been conducted for  the parents of the children and for the community in general. They also say a prayer at the start of each session.
Additionally we met 3 of the children: Abhay, Omkar and Rakesh, who receive extra tutoring ( support class is it is called at the centre) on alternate days. They expressed a great interest in mathematics and language lessons and think the tutoring is helping. they are also involved in the Extra curricular activities like drama, singing.Once a week they have book ferries bring reading material for the students. They also participate in sports. They usually carry food to the school from home, but get snacks like idlis, bhaat -amti on weekdays, and biscuits on Saturdays.

Adolescent centre:
The centre usually runs between mid-morning to early afternoon and trains women upto age 24 in vocational courses. Some of the course taught here are tailoring, beautician courses. Advanced courses are conducted based on student feedback taken typically in June through a survey. A token amount of Rs. 50/- per student is collected, by way of "sweat equity". New students pay Rs. 100/-. Teachers are called in form the communities and are paid about Rs. 1500/- for their services provided. The students are expected to take a test - written and practical formats, and also keep activity workbooks for each of the courses. We went over the mehndi, tailoring and beautician course books, as well as their test papers.
They additionally conduct exposure visits to the police stations, w/ lectures from police personnel on how to deal with domestic issues, and are also given exposure to accounting, home economics management. Trips are taken once a year to neighbouring tourist destinations.
Articles crafted by students based on the lessons received are sold once a year at an exhibition conducted by IT companies, and the funds received are directed back to the facility for Diwali/Ganesh festival parties. Accounts are maintained and receipts are given to purchasers. We purchased some beautiful diyas and mobile phone cases made by the students and received receipts from them.
At this time, they have old non-working computers, and Ms. Sharangpani is in the process of communicating with Radhika, the project steward regarding the acquisition of some updated equipment.
***Success stories:***
Three students from the centre have been employed and are using their skills to generate a monthly income of a few thousand rupees.
The ration of women getting married before 18 is reducing due to the education.
Depending on whether there is significant financial need, some families are receiving help with items like groceries etc
Support class students are helped by the tutoring, to help keep up with the lessons in school.
***Needs:-***
To provide uniforms for the balwadi children .
To perform follow up procedures with the dropouts.
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Tara Pai