**Site Visit to Swadhar (Pune, Maharashtra)**

**December 11 2015**

**Visit conducted by Veena Sriram**

Dr. Suneeti Sharangpani arranged a site visit for me on Dec 11 2015 in Pune. We travelled to the Asha Community Centre in Bibvewadi neighborhood of Pune. The area is home to low-income families, many of whom are migrants from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Men in the community are reportedly day laborers.

The Asha Community Centre operates several types of programs, including the Balwadi program, the Phulora program, a Library, and support classes. Overall, the organization has about 170 employees who are both full time and part time. The Asha Community Center has four full-time employees – one employee who manages the Library, one employee who manages the Study Center, one assistant for the Balwadi and Phulora programs, and the Centre coordinator.

We first visited the Asha Community Center, where a Phulora class was going on. Phulora classes are targeted towards adolescent girls, and are focused on teaching them skills such as tailoring courses, makeup and hair courses, crafts courses, etc. As the afternoon Support Class was about to end, we decided to go to the other building where the Support Class takes place and visit with the children there. After a short walk, we reached the place where the teaching classes for young children take place.

The children were roughly UKG-1st standard ranges, with some in LKG and a few in higher classes. Each of the children said their name and class, and we had some back and forth about their favorite classes, movies, actors and actresses, etc. Due to my limitations with Hindi, I had to rely on Dr. Suneeti to translate what was being said, but overall, there was a positive vibe in the room. The room was neat, although quite small, with posters created by the children on the wall. There were approximately 25 children in the room.

The teacher then took me to a smaller adjacent room and showed me some of the material that they have created for the Balwadi course, as well as the lesson plans for each of the children in the course. Teaching materials were neatly packed and arranged in various sections of the room. We talked about their experiences and they said that the children are well behaved, and that sometimes parents are involved in letting teachers know whether the student needs more help with a particular subject or another. They indicated that a printer might be helpful to help them prepare materials for the Balwadi course. The rooms in which the teaching classes take place are rented, and the owner recently took away keys to the restroom, and therefore students utilize their rest rooms at home, and teachers utilize the restroom in the main Asha center.

We then left the children and went back to the main Asha centre, where the Phulora class was taking place. The girls showed me some of their work, and we also went through some of the other materials that they had created, such as the crafts that they had created. I asked them what they wanted to do in a couple of years, and two said they wanted to become beauticians using skills from the beauty course. Again, my poor language skills meant that I could not have a full conversation with the girls, but I did get a positive vibe. The teacher also showed me some of the lessons/lectures for the Phulora course, and they seemed very relevant (for example, inter-personal violence, hygiene, self-confidence, etc). The space was smaller than I had envisioned, but they utilized it very well. The restroom was quite small and did not seem to have soap, but overall was maintained neatly.

We then went to the adjacent room where the administrative work took place, and also where many of the library books were kept. The library manager mentioned that some of the more popular books are Marathi books and cookbooks. Over lunch, I also had a long discussion about the program with Dr. Suneeti and the coordinator, Ms. Chandrakala. We talked about the experiences of the teachers, and things that the teachers would like to improve. Among the topics discussed:

* Space is an issue but this is the only kind of space available in this location. They are also the only organization providing services in this part of Pune.
* They reiterated the point about the printer being useful for their work.
* They also said that overall, around 100 children utilize the Asha Community Centre. The Centre has a maximum capacity of 200 children. Other activities that take place during the year are a two-week ‘Hobbies’ period during the summer where various individuals teach the children skills such as painting, etc.
* There are about 4-5 government schools in the area, with a few private schools. The students who utilize the study center go mainly to private schools. The students who utilize the support classes go mainly to government schools.
* They also said that they are ensuring that they do not make the crafts projects are not done for sale regularly, as they do not want this to become a small business venture.
* The salaries paid to the teachers are reportedly in line with what other organizations pay, but they are trying to increase it (hence the 10% annual increase that was mentioned to us along with the 2015-2016 budget). The organization is now running a faculty advancement training program, where the faculty member pays half and Swadhar pays the other half for any training program.
* A student who has used the Support Classes recently won a science fair competition in New Delhi and was given a Rs. 1 Lakh prize. The coordinator showed me a news clipping of this.

Overall, the Asha Community Centre seems to be doing good work, and the children utilizing the services seem content. The space was limited, but the managers seem to be doing a good job given the constraints, particularly for the Balwadi and Support Classes/Study Center courses. Ideally, there could have been some unstructured time with the children and also their parents but it was not possible using my Hindi skills.

We could look into a printer either utilizing funds in the existing budget or adding on some funds.