

Nav Jagriti Site Visit Report – November 2018

I visited Nav Jagriti from November 4th through November 10th of 2018, to coincide with the Diwali holiday. Dalia had been asking me to visit during Diwali for a few years, and I finally took her up on it. I have been a volunteer with Nav Jagriti since September 2009. I was originally there for 4 months, helping the students with their math and English homework. My first return trip was in 2012, and I have returned every year since, with the exception of 2016. My 2018 trip was my seventh visit to Nav Jagriti.

The first major update is that Nav Jagriti has moved to a new, slightly smaller location in the same neighborhood. Dalia explained to me that the landlord had raised the rent at the old place significantly, forcing her to find somewhere new. The new location is about 80% of the previous location's size, and felt a little cramped, but still adequate for the center's needs.

You may recall that in addition to serving as a resource for children living in the neighborhood, Nav Jagriti was itself a home for a few orphaned boys for many years. One of these boys is named Jitender. A runaway, as a child he used drugs and lived at the Nizamuddin railway station. Dalia convinced him to give up the drugs, move into the center and attend school, and by the time I came to Nav Jagriti in 2009, he was a well-performing high school student. Jitender now works in an office, and is earning enough to afford his own room in Delhi. He has remained quite close to the center however, and visits often to help out. Jitender had just received a holiday bonus at his job, and used it to take me and the staff of Nav Jagriti out to dinner. I could see how proud he was to pay for everyone's meal.

There is one family of seven children that is probably in the need of the most help. This family (four girls, three boys) lived with their mother and step-father in the neighborhood nearby. The step-father is an alcoholic and abusive to both the mother and children. However, the mother felt that she was dependent on her husband financially and therefore could not leave him. Eventually, the step-father decided he would provide for the boys but no longer would accept responsibility for his step-daughters. All of this took a heavy toll on the eldest child, Sabitha, who bore the brunt of her step-father's anger.

Fortunately, Dalia was able to help with this situation. She arranged a meeting with Sabitha's mother, and tried to explain why it was so important for her to leave this man. The mother was very scared at first, not knowing how she could ever provide for her seven children by herself. But Dalia was eventually able to give her more confidence. She explained at Nav Jagriti would provide food and other supplies for the children, and that one of their volunteers (that's me) would pay for rent at a new place (6000 Rs/month). Therefore, all the mother really had left to cover were her own transportation costs. The talk worked, and Sabitha now lives with her six siblings in a separate room, away from the abusive husband. The mother divides her time between the two residences.

This episode gives me confidence in Dalia's ability to influence the community Nav Jagriti supports. We are quickly approaching a time in which many of the female students will be of marriageable age. Dalia has already told me that some of the parents want their daughters to get married, while the students themselves want to keep studying. There are exceptions though – one father is very supportive of his daughter's studies – and I'm optimistic that others could be convinced. That said, I believe it's vital that Nav Jagriti continues to receive support from Asha during this important period, so Dalia can continue to devote her time meeting with the parents, and trying to influence them.