

Project Why - Support A Child Site Visit Report

Date of Visit: 2012-01-27

Project Location

Project Why Office: C15 Chiragh Enclave, New Delhi;

Shantigyan International School: Goyla, Near Sector 19, Dwarka, New Delhi (www.sgis.in)

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Project Background

Project Why (PWhy) is a non-profit organization with the primary role of supporting education of slum children at various locations in New Delhi. The first education centre by the project was opened in 1998, but the project has now expanded to have various other centres including after school support for primary, secondary and high school students, a crèche, a prep class, computer centres, class for children with special needs, a women centre, a foster care centre and more. PWhy has also sponsored heart surgeries for children. In addition to providing educational support to over 700 children, the organization also reaches out to children from dysfunctional or abusive families, abandoned children, or those with physical or mental challenges, who would not otherwise have any other safe-haven and could easily be at risk for exploitation. Four such children fell in the care of PWhy and were admitted to a boarding school in 2009. To read more about the origins of the project please read: <http://pwhyfive.blogspot.ca/2009/03/dear-all-welcome-to-project-why.html>. The school, Shantigyan International in Dwarka, New Delhi was chosen amongst a list of other boarding schools in Delhi. Shantigyan was found to provide the best value-based learning experience for these children. The number of children has now grown to eight. This initiative of PWhy has been supported by Asha Canada through the Support-A-Child (SAC) mechanism since 2009.

Project Visit

I had visited the PWhy site at Govindpuri two days earlier and had met with Anou at that location. Along with the rest of the project, she had also briefed me about the status of SAC and future plans. She mentioned that the children were doing well and the support was much appreciated. She did mention that the project was planning to move these children out of the boarding school and into good government schools once they completed grade 5. The primary reason being that it was becoming harder to fund the project; especially considering that the fees would continue to increase once the children reached higher classes (considering lab fee, more expensive texts etc.). An appropriate government school has not been found yet, but efforts continue. Also, since the children are in different age groups, the move to Government school would be in a phased manner, which means for now funds would continue to be required.

A couple of days after my meeting with Anou, I was accompanied to the boarding school by Mr. Satish who has volunteered with the project from the beginning and looks after the finances and other administrative work of PWhy. The school is located in Dwarka, New Delhi and was about a 30-40 mins

drive from in Gurgaon. Mr. Satish was very well informed about the project overall and also about the SAC program. During our drive he narrated some of the personal stories of the children and of how they came in the care of PWhy. Stories ranged from a girl having had surgery (sponsored by PWhy) due to hole in her heart to a boy being burnt after falling from her mother's hand into hot water when he was less than a year old. And also of how these children are doing so well now that they are in a safer and more productive environment.

The school had already been informed of our visit. Upon reaching the school, we were greeted by the financial administrator of the school. He is responsible for taking the fees and issuing receipts to PWhy. We were walked through the school to the residential building, where all the 8 kids in the care of PWhy were called to meet with us. Since we had timed our visit to reach the school during break time, it was convenient for the children. All the kids were especially happy to see Mr. Satish, and it was clear he had a special bond with them all. While most kids were enthusiastic about meeting someone new, 1 or 2 were initially very shy. They showed us some drawings they had drawn, talked about their academics and other activities, including the recently concluded Republic Day celebrations (January 26th). The financial administrator was with us all this while, and briefed me on school policy about phone calls to and by students, visits by parents/guardian etc. Being a residential school, a limited number of calls and visits are allowed for all students, and PWhy sponsored children are not treated any differently. I was informed that PWhy is very punctual with the fee payments and the children have integrated well with the school. The school building and the residential complex were clean and well maintained. The school complex also had adequate playing area for children.

During the break, the children were given a small snack. All meals (snacks during breaks as well as lunch and dinner), I was informed are healthy and provide adequate nutritious content to children. The school has an in-house medical facility housed with a couple of nurses at all times. Also, each residential complex is under the supervision of a designated teacher, who is responsible for all wards in that complex.

The break was soon over and kids returned to their respective classes. Many had messages for their parents that they wanted Mr. Satish to convey. Thereafter, Mr. Satish and I also made our way back to the car for the drive back home.

Conclusion

I returned with fond memories of the children. It was humbling to see the support provided by Asha Canada is being well utilized. It was another example of how, when provided with the right opportunities, children from all backgrounds can be successful.

Overall, the project is well administered. It is also good to see PWhy looking ahead and assessing options for these children after primary school in order to combat rising fees.

At this stage though, I would strongly recommend that Asha Canada continue our partnership with PWhy for the SAC initiative.

Project Photos

