

People First Educational Charitable Trust – Rescue Junction Site Visit Notes - 2019

The site-visit was performed independently by Mr. Martin Huckerby (martinhuckerby@gmail.com) who's a journalist by profession, now retired (formerly foreign editor of *The Observer*, London, and prior to that, a reporter for *The Times*, of London). Mr. Huckerby has visited India over several decades, for both work and pleasure, and has been contributing to charitable projects there for the last two decades, including working with other ASHA chapters over many years. He went there primarily to visit the school he supports at Kanjar Village. The site-visit was performed on May 22nd, 2019.

Mr. Huckerby met with Mr. Deepak Kumar who manages the Rescue Junction and who showed him around the entire facility. In Mr. Huckerby words – 'Deepak Kumar is an impressive leader, but he has a strong deputy in the Administrative Director, Rakesh Ranjan, and those running the Rescue Junction had an air of competence. The working environment looked efficient - while being run in a relaxed and friendly manner. The communities also appeared closely involved in the different activities.'

Mr. Huckerby met with the staff of 30 (both in Gaya and Koderma) who are involved in the rescue and rehabilitation of the lost children. The pathfinding efforts of the group have borne fruit in many ways. With central government support, they now have a smart new booth on the platform of this major rail junction. It is covered with placards promoting their messages and staffed by a couple of eager workers. Early intervention is a priority: they reckon to have 24 hours between the arrival of children at the station and being scooped up by the traffickers. They are alert to changing threats: they have acted to counter traffickers who have sought to avoid the attentions of the project by moving children through nearby stations. Another, perhaps more surprising hazard is created by pilgrims visiting the Buddhist centre of Bodhgaya and luring young children back to their home states.

Their accommodation (Rescue Junction Center) is conveniently located for the Koderma Station. At the Koderma Center, Mr. Huckerby met 17 children in the hostel, which was lower than usual because they just rented the property and were in the middle of transitioning the kids from Gaya Center. They seemed adequate to enable the staff to feed, clothe, educate and care for the children. Mr. Huckerby got the impression that it was a friendly, welcoming institution – with much effort to make it as joyful as possible (there was plenty of singing and dancing along with all the lessons). They have to handle a wide mix of ages and needs. There is great emphasis on trying, whenever possible, to reunite children with parents, although many need much longer care to rebuild their shattered lives. A couple of individuals he met included a young woman who came to the hostel as an illiterate 12-year-old, one of three sisters whose dalit parents had both died. She has now grown up and become a successful worker there for People First. A younger boy told of how both his parents had been murdered – the stories behind the arrivals at Rescue Junction are often harrowing.

On a broader front, the organisation has won national attention for its efforts. It has campaigned to develop child protection systems across Bihar, and appears adept at coaxing politicians in the state into action on some of the worst abuses.

Mr. Deepak Kumar has been running Rescue Junction since 2004 and operates 24hrs a day, 7 days a week. They have a lot of respect in the area and amongst local agencies. The railway staff as well as the local police contact them first when they identify an underprivileged child. The staff was very professional and dedicated in serving the kids. The Rescue Junction recently launched a “childline” – a dedicated phone line to offer prompt service in the event of identifying an underprivileged child. People and government officials are well aware of the childline and make use of it.

Overall, Mr. Huckerby was well satisfied with the efficiency of People First over the past five years. It invariably delivers what it promises, leaving him pleased at the chance to participate in helping such needy children.

He fully commends the organisation and my chat with him has made me satisfied with the site-visit and I feel confident about the services offered by Rescue Junction.

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Mr. Huckerby (site-visitor) meeting with Rescue Junction Staff



Koderma Railway Junction



Rescued girls at Koderma Rescue Junction undergoing vocational training (sewing). The person with orange garland on left is Mr. Huckerby (site-visitor) and the one beside him is Mr. Deepak Kumar (project partner)



Some of the many rescued boys at Koderma Rescue Junction



Pictures and art-work of children displayed on one of many notice boards at the Rescue Junction in Koderma



Some of many young boys rescued by the Rescue Junction, Koderma. A care-taker can be seen standing on the left-hand side