

Door Step School (DSS) Site Visit Report – December 2014

Visited Mumbai center (head office) on December 8, 2014 and Pune center on December 10 and 11, 2014.

Mumbai Center

Mumbai activities are divided into:

1. Slum areas (community sites) – they go to each slum and gather the children into a neighborhood place to provide instruction. This neighborhood place is usually the place of a teacher who is also from the same neighborhood. The age group they cater is 3-6 year old. They also look after younger siblings and this enables their older siblings to come to school otherwise they would have to stay back home to look after their younger siblings. Each location has two teachers and one coordinator. At some sites they also have a computer center.
2. DSS Mobile Buses – the mobile buses are converted into a mobile classroom and each bus has four slots per day of 2 hours each at different locations. Each slot has about 25 students of which average attendance is 20. Each bus has two teachers. These buses cater to street children and children of construction site workers.

About 10-15% (roughly 200) students who were educated in DSS schools have enrolled in a college since 2010.

Number of employees in Mumbai is roughly 200.

Pune Center

Pune activities are as under:

1. Construction sites – these are construction sites where the children of construction site workers are taught basic reading and math skills. Their age range is 3-6 years old. Their stats show that the average attendance is 80% and of those children who regularly attend school, about 90% are at or above their reading proficiency for their level. Builders are supposed to provide a crèche (baby daycare) for infants. DSS works with builders to also provide a room at the site itself for classroom. Sometimes builders also provide funding to pay teachers and costs for that site. This is becoming more common now, as there is increased awareness in the builder community. DSS has presence at 100 construction sites in Pune. After students graduate DSS instruction,

DSS helps to enroll them in a nearby municipal school. They have about 4,000 students enrolled in such sites.

2. DSS Mobile Buses – the mobile buses are parked at community sites where there are slums and huts. The buses also double up as transportation for students who need it from home to municipal schools and back. The buses have a TV and DVD player for e-learning, blackboard, and nice colorful pictures and charts on the walls. They also keep various teaching aides and prizes in the bus. The prizes such as pens, handkerchiefs, and water bottles are given away to students – this interests students and motivates them.
3. Municipal schools – in many municipal schools, DSS has a period allotted of about 45 minutes when they give out books and teach students reading skills with the help of their teaching aides. They have presence in about 100 schools.
4. Book Fairy program – DSS distributes books to students for their appropriate levels. These are provided free of cost and students are encouraged to read them and return. Return rate is about 70%. According to DSS, they have 150,000 books. They have a back office in a rented apartment where they house all the books. They even have library management software with barcoding that was developed by a volunteer. All books are barcoded and stamped to enable tracking.

Number of employees in Pune is about 400 in addition to about 400 volunteers of varying activeness.

Observations:

All the staff and teachers from the top to bottom are very dedicated and cheerful. They seemed happy in their job. There are many volunteers – including professionals who have left their technology jobs and working in this full time as well as volunteers from companies and educational institutions.

They took me to a DSS school bus where there were two teachers in the bus. They had a lot of teaching aides for students to learn from. Their main focus is to teach reading in local language i.e. Marathi. The children start with learning to recognize pictures and patterns, alphabets, matras, then composite alphabets and finally words. Students at different levels of comprehension are grouped and each group is given attention as well as aides accordingly. In the bus I visited, there were twice as many girls as boys, which was encouraging for me.

Next I got to visit a construction site where they had a makeshift classroom complete with wall pictures, charts, and a lot of teaching aides. Now these teaching aides are not very fancy such as you would see in American schools; they have made the most creative use of the resources at hand. Mostly made out of paper, they

incorporate ideas in using pictures and games in making instruction interesting for kids.

Next to the classroom, there was daycare for the students' younger siblings so they don't have the responsibility of taking care of their siblings and can attend school without worry.

Their day starts with a beautiful prayer and cleanliness check. Sanitation records are maintained on each student. Lot of instruction is done via poems and songs enacted out. They are also taught healthy eating and cleanliness.

The next day, I was taken to a municipal school. There the DSS teachers were present in addition to the school class teacher. The DSS teachers were providing reading instruction as well as distributing books for reading. This book distribution is part of the 'Book Fairy' program.

Everywhere I went, the students were happy to see someone new. Some enthusiastic children demonstrated their knowledge of reading. They were so adorable! It was an exhilarating feeling. Love overwhelmed the self.

At least in one respect Indian schools are doing better and that is good manners and some level of morality. They respect the teachers and when I visited they were made to stand up and greet the DSS staff and me.

I was also shown a study center where they have science lab equipment like test tubes etc for experiments and 7 computers. Students are provided computer training such as using internet, Word, Excel and so on.

In the back office, many staff are computer literate and use Excel and Access widely for data tracking. They track student data in Access with detailed reports including student demographics and their proficiency levels. They track a lot of other data in Excel.

I was told they have teacher training every month and they encourage teachers and supervisors to come up with their own ideas for improving teaching techniques and teaching aides. Many of the teaching aides are designed and made by teachers themselves.

One of the major problems is student attendance as many children belong to out of state families and whenever the parents move or visit their native place, the kids go with them for a long haul. There are other reasons for non-attendance. As the data shows, attendance is key in students successfully learning reading in 120 instruction days, which is the goal. Of the students who regularly attend school, 90% performed at or above the reading proficiency level.

DSS does not provide mid-day meals as they feel this diverts resources away from education. In a way, because they are operating in urban areas, food may be less of an issue since the kids belong to laborers and workers who earn money.

All in all, DSS is a very well managed and run operation. All staff I came across were happy in their jobs and cared about what they were doing. Most of the higher-level positions are filled from within so supervisors and coordinators have a sense of the ground realities.