

Report from Rohini Muthusamy, Asha Delhi volunteer who visited a volunteer information session

I did the site visit on 30th May. Indus Action volunteers- Hemakshi and Debanshu- conducted the training session. They began the session with a round of introduction. About 7-8 volunteers from Manzil participated. There were two interns from CCS with whom Indus Action is collaborating on the RTE section 12. After introduction, Debanshu started describing the focus of Indus Action and what is RTE, especially Section 12. Then Hemakshi put up a power point slide and explained in detail about section 12 and whom it benefits. Since Delhi also has a land Act under which Schools who got land from Delhi Govt have to reserve 10% of seats for EWS, she also explained about this act. Hemakshi and Debanshu then explained what documents are expected from the parents when they want to avail admission under this act.

The Manzil volunteers had many questions. One of their volunteer, Anil, had used the Land Act to admit his daughter into a private school four years back. The questions pertained to whom it benefits and one pertinent question was regarding who is considered EWS. The income ceiling is a state subject and in Delhi anyone with less than 1 lakh rupees per year is considered as EWS. Anil then said that the school is asking for a income certificate and though he fit in the category 4 years ago, he is no longer EWS as per the rules. So the question is whether the school would terminate his daughter's admission or will they ask him to pay the complete fee. Neither Hemakshi nor Debanshu knew the answer- it is still a gray area as the law has been enforced only few years back and such things are now cropping up. Similarly, another question that the Manzil volunteers raised was regarding the age. RTE promises compulsory education up to the age of 14. If a child was admitted under section 12, then will the school terminate the admission/ expect the parent to pay full fees when the child reaches 15 years of age. Again a gray area and volunteers from Indus Action did not have the answer.

It was a good training session. However, Manzil volunteers felt that it might be more useful for their Kotla Mubrakpur center where they get smaller kids. Hemakshi and Debanshu felt that was very important for the volunteers spread the message of section 12 in their community which Manzil agreed to do.

Hemakshi mentioned that they had initially contacted Pardarshita, another NGO working on this issue. Incidentally, Asha Delhi had supported Pardarshita for 3-4 years. We had to stop due to paucity of funds. But Pardarshita really reached out to families in North and North East Delhi. Indus Action wants to focus on South Delhi. I talked with Hemakshi about Pardarshita and what was their feedback on this issue. The major concern is going to be about how the children will cope with the studies after enrollment. Pardarshita found that some children are able to do well but majority needed tuition help. So Indus Action will have to keep this in mind and ask whether they should liaison with other NGOs for tuition classes for these children.

I did not visit any families as time was too short. Hemakshi said that she will give me a list and I can talk to the parents directly. As this is the first year when they have tried to get the children admitted to the school, I would wait for 6 months before talking to the children/parents about their experience and how the child is coping. Meantime, I can talk with Pardarshita and get their feedback on Indus Action if you want.

Incidentally, the people who started Pardarshita were with Parivartan- Arvind Kejriwal's NGO-before starting their own stuff.

Follow-up on 06/02/2014:

I talked with Pardarshita and they said that Indus Action is committed. However, they emphasized that tuition is an absolute essential as the children are unable to cope with the work. Further, it gets tougher as they go to higher classes. So you need to emphasize on this point with Indus Action.

The volunteers from Indus Action were enthusiastic as well as committed. I also liked the point they made about consulting Pardarshita instead of reinventing the wheel. Most of the NGOs do not like to consult other NGOs and end up reinventing wheel, which Indus Action has clearly avoided.

Have Anshu talk to the parents so that you get two independent opinions.

Report from Anshu Johnson sent on 06/22/2014. She talked to parents of students who tried to get information through the Indus Action channels.

(Sister of Anish Johnson, an Asha Stanford volunteer)

I contacted around a dozen persons from different tabs in the sheet and got good feedback from them about the centers' work.

Some of them were very happy with the services offered by the centers- right from getting information to filling out the relevant forms and submitting the documents. They are recommending it to others also. Few people did not have much interaction with the center - of which few did not get admission this year.

Overall it is a good initiative. My key observations are:

1. IA and their centers are having a positive impact on spreading awareness about school admission under EWS. Many persons I spoke with had good things to say about it and were very grateful for the help rendered.
2. The major problem pointed out by most of the persons I contacted was that schools, for whatever reason, are not providing the application forms to them willingly. One said that when she approached the school along with a center employee, she got a much better response from the school authorities and managed to secure the admission. IA's next step can be to think of ways to make schools more responsive. Typically persons from EWS background may not be aware of the online facilities for this admission procedure. IA can work in this area as well.
3. Awareness about toll free no. is limited. Many persons said that they are not able to get through on this line as it is always busy. they prefer to reach the center persons on their direct nos. Others were not aware of the toll free no. I tried the no. today - no one answered - being a sunday, it may be closed today - will try it again tomorrow and let you know.
4. Based on the calls it seems some centers are operating more actively than others. mehrauli center may be closed now. As it is a very people driven enterprise, the outcome will depend a lot on the initiative, motivation and drive of the persons placed at the particular center.
5. Some persons did not manage to secure the admission this year and were clueless as to what could be the reason and what they can do next. IA can provide guidance to the families on how to properly target the correct spread of schools in order to improve their chances of getting admission. for example some people applied only to 1 or 2 schools, some applied only to very high-end popular schools etc - the right spread of one's 'eggs' in many baskets maybe advisable.
6. Some persons did not seem to be aware that expenses other than the school fees may have to be borne by them e.g. books, uniform etc. So a judicious approach to select the right/affordable schools may be one of the aspects that needs to be covered.
7. Regarding social integration, since the admission has happened only a few months back, no one reported any negative reaction or any discrimination from the teachers so far. But this situation needs to be reviewed after a more reasonable amount of time has passed.

Hope this helps.