

## *26 Children, All Given New Hope Through Private School Education*

### **1. Mohammad Farman:**

Manners have become extremely important in the Imram household. But the emphasis does not come from the parents. Six-year-old Mohammad Farman is very set on making sure everyone is polite when requesting anything. He even takes it upon himself to teach these manners to his two-month-old little twin sisters Ifra and Samiya despite their inability to talk. Mohammad has learned these skills in manners and so much more in his kindergarten class at Hans Raj Samarak Public School. But his parents, Sajida Siddiqui and Mohammad Imram, do not seem to mind the new rules. They are exceptionally proud of their son's ability to develop a perspective beyond that of his neighborhood slum. But Mohammad has no idea what his mother had to go through in order he attend such an expensive school. Her battle along with the NGO Parivartan guaranteed his right to attend a school his family never could have afforded on his father's 3,000/rps/month salary as a nickel polisher. His parents are just happy that his marks in school are so strong. He is near the top of his class with scores as high as 75% in subjects ranging from Math to English to Art. His mother Sajida only wants him "to be a better citizen and to have a good job." She makes sure he is capitalizing on his new opportunity; she spends the family's extra money on hiring a tutor to help her son with his homework. While Sajida will not comment on what future employment holds for Mohammad, her smile signifies something great.

### **2. Uneeb and Areeb Sadeequi:**

Uneeb and Areeb Sadeequi's mother, Amna, wants her children to be doctors, but would not tell them so. "I do not want to put extra pressure on them," she readily added after being questioned about her children's prospects. With Areeb's excellent scores in math, one might assume him better suited as a banker than an MD; he particularly enjoys adding and subtracting. And while Uneeb's scores are also quite impressive, he spends most of his time dancing. Both children are relatively new students at New Creation Public School. Areeb, age seven, has transitioned from the government schools to his second grade class very well considering the poor quality of his previous school. Uneeb, age four, has been more fortunate in that his private school education started simultaneously with his cohorts. Amna is a teacher herself, who has a college education. Only with her help was Areeb able to make the cross over. Many other children at the end of the first grade would have been too far behind to switch from an MCD School. She acknowledges that "there is no comparison between the quality of education of the two schools." Even with her salary combined with her husband's, Neyambud, as a driver, only the reservation allows her children to attend New Creation Public School.

### **3. Sumaya**

Months ago, other people in the slums criticized Chama and Mohammad Yousef Ansari for trying to get a better education for their youngest daughter. "Why do you waste your time with just a girl' they said," exclaims Chama. But Chama knew that Hans Raj Samarak Public School would be worlds apart from the government schools. She explained to me that the discrepancy in quality of education that Sumaya receives and that of her older children-- Mosim age 14, Muntas age 13, and Nisha age 11 who all

attend an MCD School-- is profound. Chama just shrugged off the slights of others. "It hardly matters that she is a girl." Moreover, she took solace in the company of other mothers in a similar situation; the lot of them, many who did not know each other before, started to become friends. Vindication came soon enough after her daughter started doing so well. "The other mothers began to approach me and ask how they can get their child into the same school." With such talents in English, three-year-old Sumaya has expressed interests in becoming a lawyer. But she probably wouldn't tell you that since she is incredibly shy around strangers.

Mohammad Yousef works as a watch repairman for approximately 2,000/rps/month.

#### **4. Sameer and Salman Amit**

Not many mothers would characterize their seven year old as "sincere about his homework," but Pravin, a housemother in a Sima Puri slums would in describing her son Salman. Salman's brother, three-year-old Sameer, and he attend Hans Raj Samarek Public School under the EWS reservation quota. Their mother is astounded by the diligence with which her children complete their homework. Before, when Salman used to attend an MCD school, she was dismayed at the lack of care taken by the teachers. "A child could leave class and the teacher would not say anything. One time, a child broke his leg while playing [in the school's playground] and the teachers did nothing. They just sat there and did nothing." Before, with such a lack of accountability, it was difficult for Pravin to get Salman to do his homework, but now that he attends Hans Raj Samarek, he takes great care to complete all his lessons. Sameer is also intent on following his teacher's instructions; he makes his parents take a morning walk with him as per his

teacher's request. The children's father, Jameel, a tailor who makes 2,500 rps/month is also encouraged by son's enthusiasm. "My husband is so proud that his boys are learning," says Pravin with joy.

### **5. Aman and Nazneen Alee`**

Nasreen Banu is raising her children to do more with their lives than remain in the slums. She assiduously works with her children to make sure they grasp the concepts learned in school. And with so much effort, her children six-year-old Aman and four-year-old Nazneen are respectively placed first and third in their classes. Aman has talents beyond testing; his love for art is what brings him the most pleasure. "He loves to draw pictures of the cartoons he sees on television. He has pictures of all his favorite cartoons," states his encouraging mother. Probably he gets his artistic fingers from his father, Asan Alee, who is a tailor and makes about 3,500/rps per month. But unfortunately that is not enough money to fulfill Nasreen's ultimate wish for her children, which is the ability to travel around the world. With her children's promise, especially in English, she remarked that her dream is to have her two "babies" travel to England" or even "maybe America." Until that time arrives, when the Alee family has the means to travel, Nasreen said that she will be sure to do whatever is in her power to guarantee the success of her children in the classroom and otherwise.

### **6. Rakeeb Sadeequi**

It must be difficult raising five children as widow in the Sima Puri slums, but you won't hear Sartaj Sadeequi complain about it. Her passion and dedication to her children is

obvious despite her modesty and soft-spoken nature. As a teacher of Urdu to Muslim girls in the area, she understands the value of education and is determined to see her children pass all the way through, even the government schools. Ezra, the oldest at 16 years old and is the 11<sup>th</sup> grade now helps her mother educate Rakeeb who is four and attends nursery classes at Hans Raj Samarak Public School. But when Sartaj used to go out in the morning to try and get Rakeeb into a private school, Ezra would take care of the other children: Rasheed, age 14, Sameer age 12 and Rulnish age 10. The moral support was duly needed since the community was not to keen on a widowed woman walking about in the early morning with strange social workers. Apparently she was not modest and soft-spoken enough for them. But Sartaj could not care less, especially after Rakeeb's solid grades and smiley disposition. Moreover, it is Sartaj now who alienates her family from the community; she prevents Rakeeb from playing with the other slum children. She wants to leave and is considering moving in with her mother. Hopefully, her 1,500/rps/month salary will permit the move.

## **7. Lokesh Singh**

If Lokesh, age four, keeps winning prizes at Nuten Vidya Munder Public School due to high-test scores, his mother, Pushpa, will confront an infinite number of police officers. During Parivartan's "sit in" at the Education Director's office, a police officer physically accosted her with gratuitous force enough to scare any normal person. Now Pushpa just laughs about the event, almost as if it were a matter of pride. "I just wanted my rights," she says. Her son's successes have translated in validation for the long months of battling bureaucracy and noncompliant schools. Lokesh's love for English stories brings

her a great sense of pride especially juxtaposed to what she feels was inadequate education her other children received in the MCD Schools. Rajesh, age 18, Renu age 15, Tej Kumar age 12 and Bady age 10 all went to government schools and invariably dropped out by the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Pushpa noted that beyond the general education value of Neten Vidya Munder, she sees “a more civilized” disposition through Lokesh’s education versus that of her other children. As a result, she very much wants her son to give back to the community once he has grown. “Motivation for other children can come from his example,” she says. Pushpa herself received no formal education and her husband, who is now a tailor, passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **8. Pawan**

According to four-year-old Pawan’s mother, Lakshmi, here is her son’s morning’s routine: “He wakes up at around six o’clock and puts on his own clothes. He goes over to [mine and my husband’s bed] and starts pulling at the sheets. He keeps pulling until we wake up.” But the road to her son’s pedagogic enthusiasm was a bit rocky. Her first attempt at getting him into a private school went poorly. “I waited in the lobby for two hours, because the principal told me to,” says Lakshmi. “When he finally came out of his office, he did not even look at me. He just headed out the doors and to his car. He rolled up the window, locked the door, and just drove off. I just stood there and cried. Then he called on Sunday [a few days later] and told me to come the school. After getting there, he wouldn’t even see me . . . I don’t know why he did that. I just don’t understand.” I could tell she still hurts from that experience. Why the principal told her to come back will remain a mystery, but Lakshmi does not worry about it too much. Her son now

attends Nutan Vidya Mandir Public School and can already read English better than his 12 year-old government educated sister.

### **9. Harsh**

Rekha and Prehlad never had much education: she passed only the 9<sup>th</sup> grade while he completed the 10<sup>th</sup>. So with the ability to send their child to a good school such as Nutan Vidya Mandir Public School, they are hoping that their son, Harsh's educational career will last longer than theirs. Moreover, Rekha told me that she has high hopes for the family's only child living at home (their child other Shiwari, who is seven, lives with her grandparents). But, Harsh and his mother Rekha have different ideas about his future; she wants him to be a doctor and he wants to be a police officer. "He is very interested in the firearms." This curiosity with weapons is normal for a four-year-old boy and there are many years left before he decides his life's profession. This private school education has realistically given Harsh, a chance to accomplish whatever he wants. Not that his parents would object to him working along side his father at the printing press, but they now want him to aspire to more. Who knows, maybe Harsh will make police commissioner someday.

### **10. Gourish**

"He wakes up at six, puts on his clothes and then demands we get out of bed," says Sushma who enthusiastically relates how proud she is of her five year-old son, Gourish. "And even if it is the weekend, he still demands to go to school. Sometimes, only after we take him to the school and show him its closed will he stop complaining. He tells me

anything the teacher says. Manners are very important. ‘Yes, mamma. No, mamma.’ He even speaks English in his sleep.” With this new type of education and cherished values, Sushma does not want the other children in the slum to play with Gourish; she is afraid he will acquire their bad habits, most notably bad language. Thus she makes a concerted effort that her son play with children outside of the community. And when his younger brother, Yash, will start attending Nutan Vidya Mardin Public School as well, Sushma will be equally protective. Sushma expressed hope for the future of her two sons; she does not want them to end up being tailors just as their father, Mehnder. When I asked Sushma if she wants her son to become Prime Minister of India, and she said, “No, I do not want him to be corrupt.”

### **11. Shivani and Anshu Kumar**

Anshu was the first of the thirty children to be admitted under the reservation clause, because her father, Rajiv, initiated the campaign to utilize the reservation clause. Through Anshu’s and his example, the other parents were able to see tangible evidence that success is obtainable. While four-year-old Anshu is quite successful in the classroom, she is at the top of her class, her 11-year-old sister Shivani is struggling slightly to keep up with her 6<sup>th</sup> grade classwork. Since Shivani used to attend an exceptionally cheap and low standard private school, her knowledge base is not as sophisticated as her new classmates. But through a little bit of extra work, she is making up the difference. Moreover, Shivani, and her parents Rajiv and Chande are quite pleased that they demonstrate how the success of the Economic Weaker Section children is dependent on the quality of education and not their general intelligence. Rajiv foresees

Shivani achieving comfortably in her classes by the beginning of the next school year. But Rajiv is quick to point out, “education means nothing without a sense of morality” and tries very hard to dictate that adage in the lives’ of his girls.

### **12.Sharrik and Sana Khan:**

Sharrik and Sana both attend Greenfield Public School. Sharrik is seven-years-old and is in 1st grade while Sana is four-years-old and attends the Nursery school classes. Both their parents have little formal education: their mother Reasa has completed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and their father, Taheer Hussein, has finished the 9<sup>th</sup>. They have three siblings, two older, Shama and Shiba, and one younger sister Sahil who is only one and a half years old. While talking with Reasa, she was quick to point out the stark difference between MCD schools and the education her children are receiving at Greenfield Public. Shiba, who is 14 years old, only completed the 7<sup>th</sup> grade before dropping out of school and has started to work for the family. Shiba, who is nine-years-old and still attends an MCD school, is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade but would not be able to switch to a private school. Since her aptitude in many subjects is far lower due to a lack of real instruction, she would not be able to handle the rigorous course load of Greenfield Public. Reasa notes that she is not happy with her children living in the slums and wishes she could move. But says that on the meager income of Taheer 3,000/rps/month as a factory worker in a brass manufacturing, there is no possible way her family could avoid the perils of slum life. While she is so “proud that Sharrik has taken a strong liking to Math” and that “Sana, who loves all subjects,” is especially keen on the dances she learns in school, this mother sees the slums not fitting the life for which her younger children are being educated. It is

evident that these parents love all their children, but emphasize how fortuitous they feel by their younger children's ability to go to such a fine school.

### **13. Shahwej and Sheriaz Mohammad:**

Shahwej and Sheriaz, age five and four respectively do not generally communicate much with their father before heading off to Greenfield Public School's Nursery classes, because he is out late at night as an autoricksha driver. In the early morning he needs to sleep from the long night's work. But their mother, Saira, who wants her children to go farther in school than she did, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, walks them to school every morning. Saira is so proud of her children's success in the classroom and at home sings the educational songs her children learn in school. "The just love to sing and dance around and are always wanting me to join in." And when their father, Noor Mohammad, is up, he likes to join in on the family sing along as well. While their older brother Shahbaz, who is ten, is mentally handicapped, and unable to attend any school, their mother is very much set on the younger two children Samir, age four and Samy, age one and a half, following in their older siblings footsteps. Because of the many activities at Greenfield Public, the pair has begun a passion for organized sports and both children are very active. "They like to run a lot." On Noor Mohammad's wage of about 3,000/rps/month there is no way these children would have been able to attend such a prestigious school without the reservation clause, and their parents know it. And with his educational background of 10<sup>th</sup> pass, he would not be able to obtain a higher paying job to afford such fees.

### **14. Azbaaz Rehman:**

Azbaaz Rehman hated the government run nursery school he attended before enrolling at Greenfield Public School. “He did not want to go to school before. He hated that I made him go to school,” recalls his mother Shabane. But now, he is so enthusiastic that, “he is excited in the morning to go to school. He very much wants to impress his teacher.”

Neither Shabane, a housewife, nor Habibur, a day laborer who makes 3,000/rps/month, received any formal education and are extremely excited about the prospect of their children receiving an education they deem “proper.” She explained to me that the difference between the two types of schools is the innovative teaching that employs very interactive lessons. This aspect is what Shabane attributes to the remarkable difference she sees in son’s new passion for education. Moreover, she talked about depth of learning Azbaaz receives versus her three older children, Saira, 15-years-old, Rubine, 12-years-old, and Ruksaar, seven-years-old, who all attend government education. “The [MCD school] teachers don’t teach and they let the children do whatever they want.” Shabane is sure to send her youngest child, Muskaan, who is only three-years-old, to Greenfield Public School as soon as he is old enough. I asked her if she has any idea of who is responsible in the government for guaranteeing her children a right to this education. “I have no idea who [enacted these laws], but I appreciate a lot the [government action].”

### **15.Mohammad Azhar:**

Mohammad Azhar stands distinctly out in his family, which is quite difficult in a household consisting of 10 brothers and sisters. You see, Mohammad is not only the youngest, but also the first of all the children to attend a private school, Nutan Vidya

Mandir Public School. Shana who is 28 only passed the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Nawab Ali who is 24 only passed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Shabane who is 20 only passed the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Sultane who is 16 only passed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Rubine who is 14 only passed the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Fareene who is 13 only passed 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Ruksar who is 11 is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Chand Mohammad who is nine is in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and Nisha who is seven is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. With their father's income of 2,000/rps/month from working in a bicycle repair shop, the family before would have spent half that income in order to send one child to private school. After witnessing the dearth of knowledge obtained by their other children in the government school, Zarine Beghum and Abdul Kareem jumped at the opportunity to send their youngest to a better institution for free. While no one in the family has passed higher than the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, all the children still help Mohammad with his homework. And the baby of this family understands how special his situation is. "He goes around telling all the other children in the neighborhood that they go to a bad school," says his mother. And she relates how Mohammad prizes his unique ability to learn English. "He will not say anything in Hindi if he can. Everything he knows, [specifically counting] gets repeated in English."

### **16. Danish:**

Danish, the youngest of five children, is the first in his family to attend private school. And his mother Zaida is quite pleased with the in quality of education he receives. "I am fully satisfied. Everything is good: the Madame [teacher] is good, the school is neat and clean, the standards are good, principal is good." All the other children in the family attend MCD schools, ones' which Zaida describes as inadequate in teaching those presumably instructed skills. She described an average day where teachers sit and gossip

instead of instructing the children. According to Zaida, the adults just let the children run free without any discipline. Exasperated, she conveyed an image of no educational accountability; a scenario so problematic she feels helpless that her older children will have the means to move beyond the family's means. She sees Danish as the only one who can really achieve. With firm conviction she said, "I will do anything for my children." Danish's father, Nanu, is a tailor who makes about 2,200 rps/month. He is very pleased with educational progress of his son especially in English and Math where the boy excels.

### **17. Sameer Alum:**

Aftabalam dropped out of an MCD school after tenth grade, but received an education as an electrician in Flyod's Electrical Shop. He was always interested in electronics, but did not obtain the necessary skills in school to pursue his interest in a formal setting. But he jumped at the opportunity for his oldest son Sameer Alum to attend a school that could offer him the possibilities he never had. Aftabalam is excessively proud of son and all the things he has accomplished. This five-year-old attends nursery classes at Greenfield Public School and has taken a liking to science and English. And Sameer Alum is not shy about sharing his newly gained knowledge with his father. "Every time he sees something about which he learned in school, he will point and tell me the name of it in English." Also, Sameer Alum has acquired certain manners from school that he insists the family implements. These skills impress this young father so much because he admits that he never used any of the skills he learned in school. Aftabalam hopes that

when his youngest child, Gulifsa Sham gets old enough, he will also attend Greenfield Public.

### **18. Saood:**

Saood's struggle to obtain attendance to a private school was intense and might have deterred some people from continuing to try. But Saood's mother, Salma Naaz decided that despite the enmity she received from the first school she approached, that she would find one more willing to accept her son. In fact, the principal of the first school was so "ill mannered" that she decided that it was not worth the fancy education if the authority figures were so hell bent against them being there. Thus, with little internal conflict, Salma Naaz decided to try a different school, Greenfield Public. The administrators were so much more friendly and willing to comply with the law, that this mother knew she had found the right institution for her son' education. Now, Saood expresses himself creatively: he makes up his own English rhymes and draws anything that strikes his imagination. And his teacher at Greenfield Public is incredibly supportive of his talents; she regularly posts his pictures around the classroom for everyone to admire.

### **19. Sameer:**

It's quite impressive that a 4 year old assiduously counts everything he owns and everything he sees. Sameer, whose mother is an uneducated housewife and his father is a junk dealer, takes great pride in his newfound ability to mathematically sort, in his mind, sets of objects. While his tastes for setting items in a group is most likely picked up from his father's profession, his ability to count was definitely acquired at school. This sharp

young boy attends nursery classes at Hans Raj Samarak Public School. And what his teacher is most impressed with is his motivation. “His teacher keeps commenting on how enthusiastic he is in class,” says his mother Asha Begum. Moreover, she beams with pride as she recounts the comment. Both Sameer’s older siblings attend government school, and their parents desperately feel anxious about the lack of education they are receiving, especially after they have witnessed Sameer’s bright possibilities. But these parents will jump at the opportunity to send their youngest child also to Hans Raj Smarak when she comes of age.

### **20. Yakoob:**

Yakoob has a penchant for anything musical, whether it be dance or playing an instrument, this five-year-old jumps at the opportunity to be involved. Most of his exposure to music is through his schooling at Hans Raj Samarak Public School. But getting this child into a private school was not easy. His parents, Momeen and Shehnaj were denied many times at various different nursery schools. They claim that their final success is owed to the work of the people at Parivartan. “Because of them, Yakoob has a chance at a real future.” They were not too sure how their son would perceive his community ten years from now, but they think he will want to help make it stronger. His mother emphasized her feelings instilling the importance of giving back to the community. She wants Yakoob to help get more children from poor families into good schools, but more importantly she wants her son to achieve what he wants. But for now, the family does not have enough money to buy his greatest desire, a musical instrument.