

**Site Visit Report**  
**Megha**  
**7 December 2012**

**Brief**

Project WHY (We Help Youth) began in the last century as an enterprise to give something to the community by its founder Mrs Anouradha Bakshi. Asha-Seattle has been associated with it since 2005, and I personally since 2008.

Currently, there are four nodes of operations:

1. Govindpuri – which has the main office, crèche, prep class, before/after-school for primary school children, volunteer rooms, special adults/ childrens' section.
2. Girinagar colony – which has the library, computer centre, after-school for primary and secondary school children
3. Okhla – which has a small computer section, and before/after-school for primary school children.
4. Women's centre – which has a computer centre, library, women's training centre (beauty & sewing) and before/after-school for primary school children.

I visited centres 1, 3 and 4. Pictures attached.

Based on my interactions and observations, I strongly recommend that Asha-Seattle continue to support this project.

**Organizational structure**

Mrs Bakshi continues to lead the organization and remains its chief fundraiser. The day-to-day managers are Ms Rani, Ms Shamika (also Anou's daughter) and Mr Dharmendar Beniwal.

Ms Shamika in particular manages the special children and adults sections. Together, with Ms Rani they manage the teachers of the Govindpuri, Girinagar and Okhla centers, and volunteers who visit Project WHY. Mr Beniwal manages the women's centre, which is geographically distant from the other centres, and whose scope of operations is immense.

Teachers are recruited from the community itself, and the attrition rate is modest. A list of teachers and the numbers of years of service is attached in the appendix to support this. Teachers most often depart due to monetary considerations. Few of them are enrolled in correspondence courses to get a Bachelor's degree – a venture that is supported and encouraged by PWHY.

**General features:**

1. Before/After school classes: Known colloquially as "tuitions", this forms the bedrock of PWHY's educational activities. Government schools cater to girls in the morning, and boys in the evening, subsequently, boys come in the morning and girls in the afternoon to PWHY. Thus PWHY runs from about 9am – 6pm. As an incentive, teachers are provided lunch. Teachers attend to students in groups, based on the class they are in. I observed about 8 – 12 students per group per teacher. All subjects are covered in the primary sections – Class I through Class VII. For the senior students, Maths and English are covered. Curriculum followed is that of the local government school (currently, CBSE). Medium of instruction is Hindi. Students arrive from the local slums and are provided stationery at PWHY on a need basis.

2. Computer classes: These are provided for a fee. Types of classes include: hardware lessons, Tally (hugely popular accounting software in India), web design and maintenance (one student of the class has started his own business), and 2D animation. I observed younger children learning parts of the computer and using MS paint.
3. Library facilities: The women's centre and the Girinagar branches have libraries, which were sponsored by the Om Prakash foundation. As many of the books are in English, there are not many takers for this facility in Girinagar. The librarian, Mr Israel therefore has been taking on teaching tasks as time permits, as a full time librarian is not required. Library facilities are more in use at the Women's centre.

### **Changes since my last site visit**

In terms of the organization, Anou has handed the day-to-day management to three key personnel: Rani, Shamika and Dharmender, of which Dharmender run a quasi-independent outfit that provides integrated services to the Khader village community. Rani and Shamika now handle general email queries and the volunteers at PWHY. For her efforts with special children and adults, Shamika was recently awarded the Karmveer Puruskar.

In addition to the Govindpuri building that PWHY already owns, two more flats in the same alley have been purchased from Anou's personal funds. One flat is being used as a guesthouse for volunteers. The other is space for the special children and adults. Previously, three special adults used to be housed here full-time; but they are no longer present. Manu passed away, Champa has moved away, and Anjali was married away by her family. Radha, a girl with brittle bone disease, is at this centre, as the local school cannot accommodate her with her disabilities. Thus, while not mentally challenged, PWHY is her only opportunity to receive an education.

Volunteers have had a tremendous impact on PWHY – from raising funds for them, to improving the exposure of the children to different people, languages and cultures. They stay from a week to up to 6 months. Those who reside at the project pay Rs 750 a day, which includes food, transportation and accommodation. PWHY estimates that they receive 25 – 30 volunteers a year – a healthy testament to the work they do, as volunteers are typically referrals from other volunteers. The sustained and stable inflow of volunteers also suggests that PWHY can explore volun-tourism as an income generator.

The Sanjaynagar colony classes were shut down. Two reasons: a) PWHY felt it was no longer required in the community; b) inability to find rental place to hold the classes. In this vein I would like to comment that PWHY has always tried to balance community needs against the resources available. Where a need has existed and they felt it could be met, an adequate effort is made. The ability to close old centre and open new ones, or to change the composition of the types of classes made available reflect a dynamic response to the community they serve.

The women's centre has flourished. Mr Beniwal is an energetic and sensible leader who has deftly managed to become a part of the Khader Village community. The before/after-school classes mainly benefit children of migrants, while the women's centre caters to broader women's needs in the area. I heard the most interesting story, called the postcard campaign, which is just one example how the centre is changing and taking forward the community it is in. This campaign involved the children

writing about the state of their school and the difficulties they faced there from teachers, on a postcard to a High court judge in Delhi. Their postcards were included as “evidence” towards a public interest litigation filed by a prominent human rights lawyer in New Delhi. The Judge was flabbergasted by the frankness with which children had documented verbal and physical abuses by the school teachers, and the dismal state of infrastructure. This prompted a court-mandated deadline to the Delhi Municipal Corporation to improve the state of the school (clean drinking water, toilets, desks) and suspension of two teachers who were repeatedly mentioned in the postcards as offenders. So frustrated and emboldened were the children, that on the postcard they wrote their names and phone numbers, in case verification of the contents were required! This incident while successful on the legal front, has had some social consequences as it pitted the migrant children against the teachers from the community. Mr Dharmendar has successfully negotiated a peace for the time being.

## Opinion

Based on my conversations and observations, here are comments on the project:

1. Project is running exceeding well and serving its mandate. The commitment of the management and teachers is strong.
2. Inflation in India has been quite high and prices of many commodities have increased. Monetary considerations and long-term benefits are a concern for the teachers, especially the male teachers, as they are expected to take care of entire families on their single salary. Here is a breakdown that Rani provided me to gauge cost of living, for an average family of PWHY (father, mother, 3 children):

Item	Cost per month
Rent: single room, shared bathroom	2500
Electricity	500
Food	4000
Medical (for medicines, visit is free)	500
School Stationery + needs (*3)	1500
Other living expenses (soap, detergent, gas)	1000
Total	Rs 10,000/ month

The average teacher salary (please see budget in appendix) is about Rs 6,000/ month. Thus a mismatch exists between cost of living and what teachers earn. **Thus, the project requests and I support, an increase in wages for the teachers of Rs 2,000/ month, across the board.** It must be noted that the current minimum wage in New Delhi is Rs 7,500/ month. On long-term benefits, Anou would like to explore the possibility of providing health insurance to the teachers. Ill health is one of the leading causes of debt in the community and for a small premium, since group rates can be negotiated, teachers will feel more appreciated. The other long-term strategy I have advised is the National Pension Scheme, which is a federal government pension plan, open to all Indian citizens, regardless of employment status. As I move jobs frequently and sometimes unemployed, I too am invested in this! The minimum amount is Rs 6000/ year; not a difficult sum to put aside.

3. It is clear that in daily management, the project can get by with the three principal executives: Rani, Shamika and Dharmendar. However, fund-raising remains a big issue as only Anou has a dialogue with new and old donors. It was advised that Mr Dharmendar be provided structured mentorship by Anou to interact more with donors and fund-raise by himself.
4. Planet why, the integrated eco-friendly guest-house, home for battered women and special adults, is still not a reality. This project was expected to generate income that would sustain PWHY activities. Anou had a professional hospitality consultant advise on the feasibility, design and execution; all of which were positive. However, due to the quantum of funds required (Rs 10 crores), construction has not yet commenced. Land prices in Delhi, like most India though have escalated and the land the trust bought for this project is now worth 5 times as much. One proposal under consideration is to use those resources to buy a large area close to Mr Dharmender and Khader village, in a resettlement colony that the government has set up for slum dwellers.