

Background:

I first heard about Humana's project in Sahibabad Industrial Area in the Asha-Austin chapter meeting on October 7th 2007. Humana had sent an email proposal to Asha and Arvind V was asking for volunteers to take it up. It immediately interested me because I had wanted to get closely involved with a project, but given the geographic locations of most of Austin's projects, it would have been difficult for me to visit them. I was interested in this proposal, since Sahibabad is very close to Ghaziabad, which is where my parents now stay, and it would be relatively easier for me to regularly visit this project-site. I decided to explore the proposal during my upcoming trip to India in November, 2007.

Motivation for Academy for Street and Working Children (ASWC):

The goal of Humana's ASWCs is to provide basic education to the enrolled children, to teach them good life practices, and to encourage and enable them to join government schools after grade III. After conducting surveys in New Delhi's surrounding areas, Humana found that there was a large population of workers who were never the beneficiaries of government schemes, either by policy or ignorance; and their children were mostly left out. These families lived in very densely populated neighborhoods in very unhygienic conditions. Their children were often just left to roam the streets while the parents worked. In addition there were some children who worked on the streets to make a living for themselves or their families. The ASWCs we visited are meant for these children.

Initial Contact:

Once I reached Ghaziabad, I got in touch with Humana's contact person (Mohammad Khursheed) and we scheduled a site visit for Dec 7th. The proposed academy for street and working children (ASWC) would be started in Kaddmandal Village in Aug 2008. Humana has a similar academy running in another community about 2 kilometers away from Kaddmandal. We decided to first see that school and then go on to visit the premises of the upcoming school (for which the funds were requested).

On Dec 7th, accompanied by my parents, Vinit (my husband) and I visited the existing academy in Maharajpur village in Sahibabad Industrial area. We were accompanied by Mr. Khursheed and Mr. Krishan Kumar Yadav, the principal of both the schools. Mr. Krishan Kumar Yadav was in touch with us over the phone telling us the route and the location of the school.

ASWC at Maharajpur:

The Humana School in Maharajpur is run in the afternoons on the premises of Pangasa Junior High School, a private school. Humana obtained the funding for this school from the Sangneria foundation.

There were 2-3 classrooms and a big ground right outside the school. Humana uses 1 of the classrooms for its classes. There was a desk and a few chairs kept right outside the classrooms, where we had a meeting and discussion with Mr. Kursheed and Mr. Yadav. We asked about

Humana and the general working of the school. After that we went inside the classroom and interacted with the kids a little bit. Some of the kids were shy but most answered simple questions – what their names were, where they came from, what their parents did etc. I felt bad about not having taken any candy, games or something else for the kids, and will keep this in mind for future visits..

There were a lot of posters on the walls of the classroom. One of them had the lesson plans for the month, some others had colorful alphabets and numbers, and another one had the timetable for the day. The pictures from the last health checkup were also put up. The teachers showed us registers that recorded all their activities – attendance of the children, minutes of the meetings with parents, discussions with the community, pictures of the teacher training, details of the health checkup of each child.

Mr. Yadav told us a little bit about the big ground in front of the school. Before Humana's school opened, the ground was treated as a garbage dump. Encouraged and guided by their teachers, the children took up the task of cleaning the ground, which is now being used as playground by the students. According to him, the community also respects this step and strives to keep it in its current state.

Although Humana's teachers are interacting with the families of the children on a regular basis, telling them about clean hygienic living practices, there seemed to be long way to go for them. The *kachcha-pakka* road to the school, which goes through the Maharajpur village, was full of potholes and foul water, breeding mosquitoes and other insects. Many laborer families (most of who are from small remote villages) share tiny living quarters, which they rent from the owners. In most cases, both parents of the children go to work, leaving the elder children to look after the young ones. Before this school came up, these children didn't do much except roam the streets.

Kadkadmandal School:

After spending some time at the Maharajpur school, Mr Yadav and Mr. Khursheed took us to the site of the proposed school in Kadkadmandal village. Over here too, Humana had managed to mobilize the premises within the community itself. A lawyer and his wife run a private school called Vidya Mandir Public High School. They had agreed to loan the school's premises for the ASWC. Again, the route to the school was through small and dirty alleys chockablock with small houses. The premises were split on two sides of the alley. There were some classrooms with basic furniture and teaching tools, and some open space. One side of the premises was also connected to a large playground.

Since the school had not started by then, there wasn't much else to see. We thanked Khursheed ji and Yadav ji for showing us around and drove back.