

Connecting to the Idea of Impact – a report from the field

Hugh Lupson is from London and studies History and Geography at the University of Leeds in the UK. His recent university projects whetted his appetite for the social sector and he spent some time as an intern at Sattva. This was his first time in India.

Akshaya is currently pursuing M.Sc. (Hons) Economics at BITS Pilani. She has actively volunteered in the programmes of 'Education' and 'Rural Women Empowerment' undertaken by the Nirmaan Organization at BITS. Her inclination for community work led her to intern at Sattva where she hopes to learn more about how organisations specialise in social service and gain insight into social entrepreneurship.

As part of their internship Hugh and Akshaya visited a school for marginalised communities in Bangalore. Read about their experience here:

This Foundation's vision is simple: to provide the poorest children from local slums with world-class opportunities, the key is education. However, this Foundation differs from other projects in providing what they call a '*360-degree development model*', a more holistic approach to education. Besides lessons, the '*360-degree development model*' focuses on healthcare, nutrition, emotional support and community development.

We visited them on 27th September to observe the model in action. We wanted to experience the influence that Sattva's programmes have on their beneficiaries. The exploration into the lives of beneficiaries would also help us connect to the idea of impact and visualise it first-hand. The insights gained from this visit could even allow us to perceive the ways in which our new product, Shift 2.0 could give an enhanced picture of impact to all programmes undertaken by Sattva. We spent only a couple of hours at the Foundation, a 4-floor building with a multipurpose terrace. So while our analysis may be far from comprehensive, the visit gave us a valuable opportunity for a qualitative appraisal, shining a light in a way that statistics simply cannot and adding a human element to project evaluation.

Education is the primary pillar of the Foundation's approach. Their school follows the I.C.S.E, an intense yet balanced secondary-schooling curriculum. We observed several lessons including English and Mathematics. In the Mathematics class the children were using blocks representing groups of ten to form number bonds to 100. Their numerical ability was impressive. Adapting to different styles of question, the children showed an understanding of the relationships between different numbers and functions rather than simply rote learning of the bonds. This speaks highly of the teaching style here. Unfortunately – as the school's principal mentioned - the quality of the teachers here attracts the attention of fee-paying schools, who are able to lure some of them with higher wages each year.

In the English classes the students struggled slightly when not following memorised sentences. Nevertheless, they articulated to us their impressive ambitions and dreams; from becoming doctors and English teachers, to travelling the world. Through ideas like naming

classrooms after planets and asteroids, it seemed to us that the Foundation's ethos was to encourage the children not to put limits on themselves or the ways they think.

Their focus on emotional development was also clear to see. The happiness of the children is perhaps our most lasting impression of the visit. We were met in each classroom by beaming young faces, excited to speak to us and clearly proud of what they were learning. The school has a 'friendship corner' for any child who is feeling unhappy. The pupils are encouraged to sit in the 'friendship corner' whenever they are feeling unhappy and other pupils will join them to cheer them up. While we didn't see this initiative in action, it suggests that developing empathy in children was important to the school.

Unfortunately, according to the school's principal, the children's happiness doesn't always follow them home each day. Many children return home to difficult lives and carry a sizable emotional burden due to past or ongoing traumatic experiences. In response to this, the school has an in-house therapist who will see pupils on demand. However, acknowledging that a therapist will not be able to tackle this issue at its root, the school also invests in efforts to make sure children are happier at home. The community development programme aims to forge a stronger community for children through collaboration with other local schools, for example discussing a book the children had recently read via Skype. An initiative for fathers suffering with alcohol problems was also mentioned as well as teaching parents how to make soap using vegetable peel.

The children also face challenges when they graduate from the school. The strong community spirit at the Foundation's schools contrast with normal life as a young adult. We heard that not all graduates have been able to make the necessary emotional adjustments. One solution to this issue has been to extend the school's structured mentoring system to include alumni. Access to this wider network of the Foundation's alumni serves as a useful tool for pupils striving to achieve their career goals.

Some areas of the 360-degree model were harder to gain an appreciation of during our visit. We narrowly missed the children's lunch, which they had clearly been eagerly anticipating. We had little opportunity to observe the school's nutrition programme. However, the children spoke about their food with enthusiasm, especially the eggs they get twice weekly. At the risk of making an inference, it would be hard to imagine hungry children being as happy and animated as the ones we met.

Healthcare and extra-curricular activities were also difficult to gain an understanding of during our visit. While some older children had an inter school arts competition, there was a noticeable lack of outdoor space for the children to play sports and little mention was made of activities outside of lessons. With regards to healthcare, we were given only a brief look at the infirmary, which two children were using to revise for a test. The teachers didn't mention the healthcare programme. However, we noticed that the children's ID cards were lacking basic details such as their blood group. As such, for the next visit: nutrition, extra-curricular



activities and healthcare should be prioritised for a deeper understanding of the Foundation and its impact.

In its 16th year, the Foundation and its pupils seem to be thriving. The school has received several awards for innovation from institutions including the British Council and Tata Communications. Going forward, the principal mentioned that a key objective for them will be to secure a more reliable funding system. Currently, with funding only being guaranteed for one year at a time, it is difficult for the school to plan for future growth. Perhaps with a 5-year funding guarantee, the Foundation could scale-up and reach its true potential.

Sattva has been working with various nonprofits and social organisations as well as corporate clients to help them define their social impact goals. Our focus is to solve critical problems and find scalable solutions. We assist organisations in formulating their long-term social impact strategy by strategically aligning with business to provide meaningful solutions to social issues.

- Talk to us: impact@sattva.co.in