

Background

When I think about how conflict is created, and why we are unable to properly address the issues that divide us and keep us from solving the big problems of today, the first thing that comes to mind is a lack of understanding, perpetuated by a lack of knowledge. In essence, I could link the root of most of the problems we face today and our inability to find solutions to them to a lack of proper education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes education as a human right – something which should be accessible to all. Yet, according to UNICEF, about one in five school-aged children today do not attend school. Moreover, the inability to go to school is only one part of the problem. The other part, which most forget to address, is the quality of education. According to UNICEF, “schooling does not always lead to learning. Worldwide, there are more non-learners in school than out of school.”¹ Untrained teachers, poor facilities, and lack of sanitation are a few among many factors that make education in a lot of places accessible, but not beneficial.

Some of the most vulnerable people when it comes to getting an education, particularly quality education, are the children of sex workers. In India, my home country, and where I intend to do this project, sex workers are a highly marginalized community. They continue to face a lot of stigma in society and a large number of them are unable to enjoy the basic rights the Constitution promises them, partly because of society’s view of their work as “immoral”² and the resulting lack of remedy when their rights are violated, and partly because they are themselves unaware of many of their rights as they were never educated. The lack of acceptance trickles down to their children, who face abuse and ostracization by their peers and teachers even when they do manage to go to school, which is not very often. According to a study by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in India, the bias these children face at a young age makes them prefer isolation to mixing with society. This prevents their mental, social, academic, and sometimes even physical well-being.

The NCPCR has also said that the children of sex workers need quality education, re-integration, and rehabilitation to protect them from the “influence of their traditional practice.”³ This can be the abuse and discrimination they face, the risk of being forced into the same profession as their parents when they become adults or even as children, the risk of substance abuse, and the risk of sexual exploitation. My team, along with the NGO we are working with and the parents of these children, believe that education is the best way to protect them from these negative influences and give them a chance at building a better future for themselves and the world.

Our Plan

Our project will be divided into two parts. The first part will be to develop a computer lab at a bridge school run by Kat-Katha⁴, a local NGO that has spent many years working with sex workers and their children at G.B. Road - Delhi’s largest red-light district. The school run by Kat-Katha is separate from formal schooling, and designed specifically for the children of sex workers, who are often unable to assimilate into normal school and drop-out from regular school as a result.

Through this computer lab, we want to make learning, especially during times like the pandemic, more accessible to these children. We will install six desktop PC’s in this lab, each installed with an year-long Adobe Creative Cloud subscription and a subscription to BYJU’s, an Indian online learning platform that is designed per the Indian curriculum, which will make it easier for these students to study for mainstream exams as well. We will also install a projector and a screen on which students can watch educational videos, documentaries, and even just movies every once in a while which can help them develop language skills, as well as give them a way to simply have some fun.

The second part of our project will be a set of workshops spanning over three weeks that we will conduct to introduce students to this new form of studying based around computer literacy - the future of education and the job

¹<https://www.unicef.org/education#:~:text=All%20children%20have%20the%20right,much%20money%20their%20family%20has.&text=In%20144%20countries%20around%20the,skills%20they%20need%20to%20thrive.>

² <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4065224?seq=1>

³ <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/children-of-sex-workers-face-abuse-and-discrimination-in-school-become-isolated-study-by-child-rights-body-1439319-2019-01-25>

⁴ <https://katkathaa.wordpress.com/>

market. These workshops will also help them put their new computer lab to the best possible use. The schedule for the three weeks will be as follows:

Week 1: Workshops based on computer literacy by volunteers and professionals. Instructions on how to effectively use platforms like Zoom, Khan Academy, BYJU's⁵, Canva, and basics in Adobe Creative Cloud for older students as well as how they can further enhance their skills simply by finding tutorials online. On the first day, we will also instruct students on how to take care of the equipment we provide.

Week 2: Career Fairs - We will bring professionals from different fields to talk about their jobs and how to prepare to get into those jobs if anyone is interested. For some of these workshops, we plan to call Kat-Katha alumni, many of whom now have successful careers. We also plan to partner with Creativity Adda⁶ for this, which is another local initiative that Kat-Katha has previously worked with which focuses on non-mainstream education.

Week 3: Additional workshops on important issues outside the computer-literacy program such as recognizing good and bad touch, rights and how to report abuse, STD's, etc. We hope to collaborate with local police and health officials on this. Finally, we plan to conduct a wrap-up workshop on the computer-literacy program and on how everyone can help each other with the information they gain.

All of the members in my team are fluent Hindi speakers, which will make our communication with the NGO as well as the students, volunteers and local officials easier. I also hope to be able to put to use some of the strategies that I have learned through my experience teaching children in an orphanage and school for underprivileged children, and a school for underprivileged girls.

We have already talked to Kat-Katha about our plans and they are very happy to work with us. I have also reached out to other professionals to collaborate with for the workshops, and am positive that many of them will gladly be a part of our initiative. We already have confirmation from Suman Doogar, a travel blogger and psychology teacher at Amity International School Saket, a well-reputed private school in South Delhi. I plan to tell even those who are initially hesitant more about these children and talk to them about the reasons behind their stigma – because removing prejudice, I believe, is a constant process that requires work even at the “smallest” of levels, and this work should not be avoided.

Expected Outcomes and Future Impact

We expect this project to result in a sustainable model of education for the children of the sex workers of G.B. Road in which they are able to keep up with the mainstream curriculum of the country by getting quality online tutoring and continuing online learning through times like the pandemic. We also want them to have the ability to explore their other skills and interests in areas like designing, filmmaking, podcasting, blogging, vlogging, etc. and also learn skills that can support their existing interests, for example a student interested in dance learning how to mix songs for their performances. We want them to benefit from computer literacy and the various opportunities that opens in today's job market, as well as the plethora of platforms and learning avenues it offers.

Our project is designed such that its impact will not be limited to the four weeks that we are actively part of it. The Computer Lab will be present for students to use for a long time. The students will be trained on how to take care of the lab, and Kat-Katha has also offered to take charge of the continued maintenance of the lab and to oversee its usage. Kat-Katha told us that the year-long Creative Cloud subscription paid for by us will give them time to collect sufficient funds to continue the subscription in the future. Moreover, a Kat-Katha representative told us that they are part of a tight-knit community where older students teach younger students what they know, and students who grow up and get jobs come back to mentor the kids in the school. As a result, what we teach the children in four weeks will effectively create a knowledge bank that many future students will also be able to benefit from. The information these students gain about topics outside of computer-literacy, particularly relating to issues like rights and preventing exploitation, sexually-transmitted diseases, etc. will also enable them to be a resource for their parents who work in the brothels of G.B. Road.

Beyond the work we put in for our lab and computer literacy-based curriculum, we also plan to record the stories of these children and their parents and make a documentary out of it. We will ensure that we have proper consent before we record anything or anyone, and Kat-Katha has assured us that the making of a documentary will be possible. I have a camera and video-editing software and am also majoring in Documentary Studies and Production, so I believe that the making of the documentary will be quite viable.

We plan to post this documentary on Kat-Katha's youtube channel, and also send it out to media channels and any influencers we have connections with to make sure it gets as much attention as possible. We will also try to reach out to schools around Delhi to convince them to show the documentary to their students and teachers. I believe that in this way, we will be working not only to improve the lives of these children through education but try our best to remove or at least reduce the stigma that surrounds them every day of their lives. Through this, we hope to also touch more lives than of those who we help with the computer lab, and make this local initiative part of a broader movement.

⁵ byjus.com

⁶ <http://shikshantar.org/innovations-shiksha/creativity-adda/creativity-adda>