

## **Davis 100 Projects for Peace Final Report- Summer 2007**

**Title:** Empowering Women through Education

**School:** Methodist University

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Saharanpur is a small city located in North India. The city houses more than 500,000 residences. It is one of the most densely populated cities in India. The project was planned to provide women who are less privileged and unskilled an opportunity to acquire new skills so that they can be able to support themselves and their family and become productive members of the society. We opened Women's Vocational Center or WVC ([www.wvcindia.org](http://www.wvcindia.org)) to serve as a training facility. We held two two-month sessions which offered various trainings; for example, hair-dressing, tailoring, machine-embroidering, and elementary education to more than 80 women. Each class ranges from an hour and a half to two hours six days a week.

My team and I started working on the project on May 1<sup>st</sup>. We spent the first four weeks preparing the venue, setting up the building, purchasing appropriate tools and equipments, circulating the news, recruiting students, hiring instructors, and preparing courses. The students who participated in this project were selected based on their learning potential, financial background, family background, desire and dedication to excellence, and most importantly the needs to learn. We would like to have the participants who are in need of learning and developing new skills and want to make a difference in their lives. Instructors, however, was hiring to be a part of this special program based on their teaching background and experience. Also we hired those who we believe would respect those less fortunate women and are willing to contribute their time and skills to make a difference in their lives. We had over 100 women registered for the trainings in the first session and had five instructors to instruct those classes. We also hired a manager and three staffs to work on administrative and management issues.

We had the orientation for students and staffs on June 1<sup>st</sup> and the trainings started the following day. Besides hair-dressing, tailoring, machine-embroidering, and elementary education we also offered some workshops, for example, candle making to provide hands-on practice and experience to give the students quick and easy lessons that might fit their best need.

Attendance policy was strictly kept to maintain discipline. A regular check and updates were given to teachers to maintain the quality of work and environment in the center. At the end of the program, we held an exhibition for the students to present their works/ products made during the trainings. The products included children's clothes, women's suits, place mat sets, napkins, candles, and embroidery designs. We furnished the certificate of graduation to the students who fulfilled the requirements of WVC. The requirements of WVC are (1) to attain more than 90 percent of the trainings, (2) to pass the exams, (3) to enter into the professional field they had acquired during the program, and (4) to find the minimum of ten customers who would support their products or services. Additionally we rewarded those who achieved the outstanding performance upon the graduation to recognize their talent, dedication, and hard work and to encourage that they did the right thing. We believed it will help other women to realize their full potentials and it is possible to reach the same result if they put effort into it.

I am happy that the project is still in the running position with the second batch of 64 women and I wish it would stay this way for a longer term, helping more and more women.

This project was one of the most effortful experiences I have done. Being one of many who dedicated time and effort into making this happening and experiencing the positive changes the project brought to those women's lives was purely rewarding. From my personal experience, this project was very successful. We were able exceed our goals and expectations. Initially, we planned to have between 30 and 40 women in trainings; however, we had close to 100 women participating in the program. Those women showed up at our site because they all wanted to better themselves, to be productive and to make a difference in their lives. The feedback we received from the community members was positive. The students and their families appreciated the project and the work we did. They hoped we could continue to have these trainings in the future.

I believed we accomplished all goals we have set at the very beginning. The project was able to empower those less privileged women through education to have more self-confidence and to increase the productivity in their home and in the society. Even though it was quite challenging to convince students to fulfill all the requirements before they could get the certificate, it eventually worked. They finally realized that those requirements were achievable. Initially, I would like our project to be linked with some local NGO/NPO so what we do can benefit both of us. We are enthusiastic about this project and they have experiences and funds that can support us. Unfortunately, we could not reach the mutual agreement. Their intentions did not suit our criteria. Therefore, we worked exclusively on our own.

Our selections of students were not biased towards any groups or racial background. Everybody was welcomed and considered for admission; however, due to limited number of space available we had to reject quite a few numbers of applicants who were more comparatively in need than the other. We had some students commuting daily from nearby villages: some had to travel more than 35 miles. Each student's story was heartbreaking. For example, one of our students was terrified by her son beating her up when asked for money, some by their husbands, and so on.

The project's implications for peace were that the women would now find a way to support themselves in an upright way without having to get into serious crimes like prostitution. They can now feel more confident to be able to support themselves and not to get into trouble with their husbands, fathers, brothers, and/or sons.

There are several future prospects for (and from) this project. This project is expected to finish by the end of October 2007. We will complete the two sessions and prepare approximately 170 women to be more self-efficient. The project has already started showing a lot of positive short-term outcomes, which is reflected by the reports that we get from our former students. Nevertheless, my team and I have worked intensively on finding more funds to support our organization and keep it running. After our calculations, we figured that since the set up is already established we will need approximately \$2,500 to run each session of 2 months. There are uncountable aspects of life that I learnt from this project like management, leadership, team spirit, sincerity, responsibility, discipline, stability, independency, and most importantly, the encouragement to do more. I am now well-prepared and ready to take the challenges of the real world.