

Ashraya Initiative for Children Computer Education Center

Project Report - Davis 100 Projects for Peace

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Project Summary

The Ashraya Initiative for Children (AIC) Computer Center Project seeks to teach slum and street children in India basic computer skills in order to prevent them from having to face a future of living and working on the streets. We anticipate that the possession of these skills will enable the children to sustain their families by obtaining decent jobs once they reach adulthood. In addition, the AIC computer initiative aims to provide a means for peace by establishing relationships between impoverished children and young people from all over the world. Our goal is to promote peace and international understanding through cross-cultural exchange via online communication with students from partner schools. We aim to empower as many children as possible through the provision of computer education, in order to provide them with a fair chance to pursue their dreams.

The AIC Computer Center Project was established during the months of July and August 2007 in Pune, India. During the course of these two months, we cleared out space for the center, ordered and purchased equipment and worked hard to get all devices to function. Our main efforts consisted of daily trips to numerous computer retail centers as well as research about pricing of the necessary equipment and the reliability of various suppliers. Since dust and pollution are major issues in India, cleaning activities of the available space for the center consumed a large amount of time. While we were waiting for the equipment to be delivered, our children at the home grew more and more excited in anticipation of having a computer center set up for themselves and other youngsters!

Once the computers were delivered, we spent two days assembling the purchased equipment. Our biggest challenge during the initial stages of the project was the shortage of electrical wiring as well as difficulties in setting up a stable internet connection for all computers. Power supply in India is generally unreliable and gets cut off multiple times per day; this issue represented a great strain on the amount of time we could allocate for programming the computers.

While we did not receive funding from sources other than the 100 Projects for Peace grant, we did have the distinct advantage of being able to integrate our computer education center into the operations of an already existing, stable organization. Not having to rent out additional space for the center helped us cut costs and enabled us to use our funds in the best possible manner.

Project Results

As of August 2007, the AIC Computer Education Center is fully functional and in regular use by all children from our residential and outreach programs. In the initial proposal, we defined our target population as "street and slum children". To date, we have succeeded in providing computer access to 22 children from these marginalized populations. Regular computer classes have started, and our children are on an extremely steep learning curve. Volunteers as well as our home director have taken responsibility for teaching multiple sessions per week. We are planning on hiring a computer teacher during the next few months, but have so far been unsuccessful in filling this position. Our classes are kept small, so that every child will be able to follow the curriculum. As time goes by, management on site will be taken on by volunteers and the home director. I

will assume responsibility for coordinating volunteer involvement and work to set up videoconferences with partner schools.

Since the school year in the United States and most western nations has just started or is about to start, we are lagging in our efforts to set up videoconferences with partner schools. To date, we have not yet been able to engage our children in videoconferences. Nevertheless, online conferences and E-mail exchange with children from all over the world will soon become regular events. We are currently in touch with schools in the UK, Uganda, Austria and the United States and have identified potential partner schools in Pakistan and Japan.

Project Implications

The AIC Computer Center has the potential to change the lives of a large number of street and slum children for the better. As our organization grows, we will be able to offer computer education, along with basic schooling, to more and more children from impoverished populations. In addition to being literate, these children will be sufficiently skilled to take on jobs that pay enough to support them and their families. Despite the fact that we can only provide schooling and computer education to a limited number of children at one point in time, we are able to positively impact the lives of many others. A young adult who obtains employment thanks to excellent computer skills is capable of keeping his or her entire family off the streets. Giving a group of marginalized children a fair chance in life hence generates a snowball effect in their respective communities and represents a powerful, long-lasting tool against poverty and life on the streets.

Our project fosters peace in many ways, and has immense potential to counter violence, prejudices and poverty. The children directly involved in one of our computer education programs have found a safe haven within the walls of our home and computer center. They flourish in a supportive environment, are no longer subject to violence on the streets, and can afford to have dreams for the future. Computer literacy is a skill that no one will be able to take away from them, and it will radically increase their set of opportunities in life. By enrolling and increasing number of street and slum children in our computer literacy program, we will also be able to actively counter violence and crime through the reduction of individuals who live and work on the streets. That said, the majority of children in our program will be the first generation in their family to grow up without having to experience violence, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, hunger, homelessness and deprivation.

While the AIC Computer Initiative will cause substantial improvements for Pune's slum and street children as well as their families, the scope of the program will reach much further than that. The communication component of the program will promote international understanding, challenge stereotypes about street children locally and abroad and provide for a great tool to provide authentic education about foreign countries and cultures to individuals at a very young age. The videoconferences will spread awareness about important matters, such as poverty, war and political issues. Children from partner schools as well as the children in our local programs will learn about the importance of peace, about ways to make long-lasting, positive changes in today's communities, and what it means to be a citizen of the world.

For me, the establishment of this computer education center will bring about yet another chance to demonstrate that small projects can cause significant, permanent improvements for many individuals over time. My AIC colleagues and I are immensely grateful for this opportunity. We will do our very best to achieve our goal of promoting peace through the computer education initiative.

Kajal and Santosh are enjoying their computer time



First computer lesson – talking about the rules



Team Jyoti and Sanjay

