

SAAJHEDARI

Stories of Aspirations, Resilience and Change,
School Management Committees in Delhi



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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has”–

Margaret Mead

Rajanish Singh
Director



**State Council of Educational
Research and Training**

(An autonomous Organisation of GNCT of Delhi)
Varun Marg, Defence Colony, New Delhi-11002
Tel.: +91-11-24331356, Fax : +91-11-2433242
E-mail : dir12scert@gmail.com

Date : 16/3/22

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Message

There often comes a time when an institution must take a step back and reflect on what it has achieved so far. Such reflections help in basking in its successes, learning from its failures and most importantly, in charting the journey forward. As an institution, when we look back at the journey of School Management Committees in the state, we find that we have several reasons to celebrate.

Although the formation of SMCs in Delhi was fraught with challenges, over the years these committees have truly come up by taking ownership of the government schools and transforming them in myriad ways. The hard work and dedication of our SMC members have helped us in making our schools more accessible and more empathetic towards our students. These individuals have worked tirelessly in their schools without any monetary reward, often compromising on their personal and professional commitment. We felt it was important to recognise their achievements and to acknowledge their exemplary contribution towards enhancing the state of education in Delhi.

Through this book, we want to celebrate the stories of these individuals-this is a small token of gratitude from us to the thousands of SMC members of Delhi. Each story in this book is a remarkable journey of transformation-not just of the school, but also of the individual. We will see how these SMC members have transcended barriers, simply with their determination and grit and worked in collaboration with various stakeholders for the development of our schools. Each intervention mentioned in this book, is a step forward towards making education truly inclusive and meaningful. We hope this book gives our readers a glimpse of the terrific work done by SMCs in Delhi, and also serves as an inspiration for similar experiments elsewhere in the country.

Rajanish Singh



Dr. Nahar Singh
Joint Director (Academic)

State Council of Educational Research and Training

(An autonomous Organisation of GNCT of Delhi)

Tel. : +91-11-24336818, 24331355, Fax : +91-11-24332426

Tel.: +91-11-24331355, Fax : +91-11-24332426

E-mail : jdsccertdelhi@gmail.com

Date :16/3/2022.....

D.O. No. :21.6/JDB.....

Message

Much like the title suggests, this book is culmination of a journey that involved extensive collaborations. We were extremely privileged to work with, and enjoy the support and guidance of parents, heads of schools, NGOs, volunteers and experts from various domains. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the SMC members whom we interacted with for this book, without which 'Saajhedari' would not have been possible. The journey of SMCs over the past 5 + years has not only been inspiring, but also helped us imbibe several traits that they have beautifully showcased, while working in schools and communities surrounding schools.

I hope that this book inspires parents across the state and country to collaborate and take a step towards improving the schools, communities and beyond.

Finally, we would like to congratulate the Coordinator of the project and the entire SCERT team for their efforts in the book's development and making this release possible.

We would also like to thank Saajha and its entire team- an NGO that has for strengthening SMCs and supporting diligently in contextualising, coordinating and drafting this book

Dr. Nahar Singh

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Section 21 of the Right to Education Act provides for the constitution and functions of School Management Committees in certain categories of schools. SMCs comprise of 16 individuals, which typically include elected parent representatives, the Principal of the school, teachers from the school, the local MLA and a social worker. They are meant to serve as a critical bridge between the community and its school by actively fostering parental involvement in education. Despite this important role that SMCs play, initially the scenario in Delhi was a challenging one. In 2013, it was the worst performing state with respect to formation of SMCs, as per DISE Flash Statistics 2012-13, (released in November 2013). At the end of 2012, only 6.93% of Delhi's government and aided schools had constituted SMCs. However, what followed was a remarkable story of transformation – extensive trainings of SMCs were conducted, NGOs were roped in for capacity-building of SMCs, the powers of SMC were enhanced, many government school interventions were driven through SMCs, grievance redressal was made smoother and SMCs were given a place of prestige and respect in the school ecosystem.

With these changes in place, people slowly began taking charge of government schools in their neighbourhoods and helping their communities overcome barriers to education. SMC members were facilitating admissions for out-of-school children, running community libraries, and inspecting the quality of food served in schools. Such has been the scale of the transformation that Harvard University decided to undertake a research study to understand Delhi's successful experiment with School Management Committees. Over 30000 SMC members are active across Delhi. While SMCs have received significant media attention over the past few years, the stories of individual SMC members have often been ignored. We felt it was important to celebrate the stories of these people – by giving them a space to share their narratives. What motivated them to join SMCs? What were their most significant achievements? What principles and values did they follow in their work? What were the challenges they faced? And most importantly, what keeps them going? With these questions, we conducted workshops with SMC members and asked them to write their stories. We also approached school principals and teachers and asked them to share their stories too. Once all the stories were collected, we refined them by adding supplementary information and conducted follow-up interviews. In the course of four months, each story was made a part of a narrative that exemplified the aspirations and struggles of these incredible individuals.

As the title explains, this booklet substantiates what '*Saajhedari*' (Collaboration) between schools, government, parents and community is truly capable of achieving. The journey to change the world is a long and arduous one; but if a start has to be made, then it must begin with our schools. In Delhi, SMCs have become a crucial vehicle for this journey – as these stories amply explain. However, as we bask in this success, it is also important to reflect on how this change can be sustained and replicated across every school in this country.

Dr. Ritika Dabas

Sr. Lecturer and Coordinator, SCERT (Delhi)

List of Contributors

Advisor	Rajanish Singh, Director, SCERT, Delhi Dr. Nahar Singh, Joint Director, SCERT, Delhi
Program Coordinator and Editor	Dr. Ritika Dabas, Sr. Lecturer, SCERT, Delhi
Content Team	Dr. Ritika Dabas (Sr. Lecturer, SCERT); Ms. Urvashi Nagpal (Saajha) Mr. Akshay Shetty (Saajha); Ms. Shruti Mohil (Saajha)
Content Review Team	Dr. Ritika Dabas, Sr. Lecturer, SCERT Dr. Meena Sehrawat, Asst. Prof. DIET Ghumanhera Mr. Manish Manohar (Saajha) Ms. Vinya Kurtkoti (Freelancer)
Publication Officer	Dr. Mukesh Yadav, SCERT Delhi
Publication Team	Mr. Navin Kumar , SCERT Delhi, Ms. Neha Rizwana , BRP, SCERT Delhi Ms. Radha , SCERT Delhi, Ms. Fouzia , BRP, SCERT Delhi

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SCHOOL SUPPORT

Government schools often face a chronic shortage of resources as they straddle multiple responsibilities in schools with over a thousand students. As such, the support of the School Management Committee proves crucial in ensuring that school functions in an optimum manner. SMC members lend their support for various interventions that are conducted in the school. Being members of the community, SMC members have an astute understanding of the area and often have deep connections with people there which help them in aiding the school's functions. Some of the areas in which SMC members support the school are listed below.

One of the responsibilities of the SMC is to ensure the enrollment and continued attendance of children in the neighbourhood. SMC members monitor the school's attendance and prepare lists of students, who are regularly absent. They reach out to these students and parents to find out reasons for their absenteeism. They address any concerns that may affect their attendance and ensure that students come to school regularly.

There have been some cases of students in government schools being addicted to drugs. To address them, SMC members visit homes of the affected children and counsel them and their parents. They also ensure that support systems are made available to such students in their school and in the community. After helping them get rid of their addiction, these members also help them focus on their studies and other extra-curricular activities.

Apart from this, SMCs also lend their hand in organizing various functions in schools, like the Annual Day and Sports Day. They also help in raising funds among parents if the school has any urgent requirement. With the support of the SMC, schools are able to perform their functions with greater efficiency, while also ensuring that the needs of the local community are kept in mind.

Where Every Voice is Heard



Savita Rawat has been the Principal of SKV No. 2, Punjabi Bagh for over nine years now. She has also served as a Biology teacher, Savita is deeply passionate about children. She rarely gets time to conduct classes now, but she keeps seeking ways to be connected to her children even in the midst of her busy schedule. Savita firmly believes that education will realise its true meaning when students are made equal stakeholders in the process. When she became Principal, she went to classrooms and asked students what they wanted from the school. Impressed by their ideas, she decided to put up a suggestion box near her office where students could submit their ideas, complaints or suggestions anonymously. She opened the box after every two to three months and addressed the points raised by the students.

When her school's SMC was formed, members brought up the issue of students' grievances. It was felt that while the suggestion box has been in place, the students haven't been using it actively. The SMC then decided to institutionalize the suggestion box and give the initiative a fresh start. SMC members announced the decision to students during the school assembly. They communicated to the students that the suggestion box will be opened after every 15 days and the suggestions will be addressed immediately. On its part, the SMC decided that the suggestion box will be opened in SMC meeting, each issue will be discussed and action



steps will be proposed. The initiative received a positive response from students.

Every time the SMC opened the box, they read myriad suggestions offered by students – ranging from the behaviour of teachers, difficulty in studies to uniforms and bullying. Each issue was discussed in detail and the action steps were announced in the assembly. For example, when students wanted NCC in the school, Savita assured them that she will speak to the Director of Physical Education and will bring up the issue. When students complained about certain teachers, she individually spoke to the teachers and discussed the issue with them. In one month, more than 50 problems faced by students were resolved. Because of the suggestion box, students felt that their voice was being heard, which helped in engendering a sense of ownership in the school amongst them.

Savita also narrated a funny incident that the suggestion box led to. Towards the end of the academic year, the suggestion box received a plethora of notes from Class 12 students urging the Principal to organize a farewell for them and to let them come to school in civil dress that day. Savita brought up the issue in the assembly and told students that often students end up forcing their parents to spend money for their farewell clothes and other expenses, and hence she wasn't inclined towards organizing a farewell. Once again, the suggestion box was flooded with students promising that they won't force their parents and requested the Principal to let them have a farewell. Savita didn't want to dismiss the enthusiasm of the students – the farewell was organized with fervour, albeit in school uniforms. This incidence led to better understanding between the school authorities and students. Students realised that, school as an institution not only implements curriculum but is also responsible

Going Door-to-Door for Education

for executing moral responsibilities. They learnt that celebration can be made a part of school life without taxing the parents.



When *Puran Chand Jangid* was 14 years old, his father brought him to Delhi from his native village. Robbed of an opportunity to complete his education, he started working as a carpenter with his father and uncle in the city. His marriage was arranged at the age of 17, and the responsibilities that followed it ensured that all the dreams that he nurtured as a child were effectively crushed. For Puran, his children became the vehicles to realize those dreams and all that he wanted to ensure was that they didn't have to face the fate that he did as a child. He currently lives in Mohan Garden and works as a carpenter in a private organisation in Manesar, Haryana.

Eight years ago, when Puran wanted to admit his son in a government school; he found out that the process was too tedious and stressful. He spent 20 days running from one government office to another in the scorching heat, however no one was willing to help him. The admission was finally secured because of the DDE's intervention. Puran wondered if other parents were facing similar issues too. This became his motivation to join VKS, which eventually became SMC. Such was his contribution that his school didn't want him to discontinue even after his children had left the school. So, he became a social worker in the school's SMC.

Story from Government Boys Senior Secondary School, Mohan Garden

Government Boys Senior Secondary School, Mohan Garden is approximately 1.5 km from the main road. It can be approached by two-wheelers, not cars. There are a few houses and small shops nearby. Children here are from low income families.

When Puran started working as an SMC member, he found that many students did not come to school regularly. He decided to go to their homes to speak to their parents. He was turned away at several homes and they refused to entertain him. Puran, however, didn't give up and kept visiting homes and urging parents to send their children. Moved by his efforts, many parents started sending their kids to school regularly. Puran now maintains a file with details of students who are irregular at school and documents all the actions taking by the SMC to address the issue. Over time, Puran has become a familiar face in the community and he always has visitors at his home, who seek his guidance for admissions or other school related work. For the past one year, Puran has also been successfully running a reading mela in his community with the help of the SMC members.

Puran still faces several challenges. It takes him four hours to travel to and from his workplace. His daughter has been very ill, and her medical expenses have been hurting him financially. However, his work with SMC members has been so gratifying for him, that it gives him some temporary relief from the harshness of his life. He feels happy that he has been able to do some good for people. *"Main toh anpadh reh gaya. Ab bas itna chahta hoon ki gareebi ki vajah se koi aur anpadh na rahe"*, (I remained an illiterate. I just want that no one should be illiterate because of poverty) he says.

Tackling Drug Addiction with Empathy



For Purnima Kaushik, education has been a constant companion throughout her life. Coming from a family of educationists, it was a natural career choice for her. With decades of teaching experience, she is currently the Principal of EDMC Primary School, Shashi Garden.

According to Purnima, she was one of the first principals in Delhi to constitute an SMC in her school. She felt that SMCs were an important medium to reach out to the community, especially to the parents of her students. From the very beginning, she was deeply interested in creating and nurturing a strong and effective SMC in her school.

While the school faced a number of challenges, the most serious one was drug addiction. Purnima found out that over 25 students in the school were severely addicted to drugs. In 2013, The Department of Women and Child Welfare and Directorate of Education had identified 250 schools where instances of substance abuse were observed or which were located in localities that facilitated abuse. Purnima informed her teachers that ostracising the addicted children was not a solution and they will have to look for more effective remedies to the problem. She called a meeting of her SMC and discussed ways of helping these children with other members. SMC social worker helped them to collaborate with Muneer, an NGO that works for drug addicts.

Story from East Delhi Municipal Corporation Primary School, Shashi Garden.



Purnima herself had some experience with counselling which she decided to employ here. Every day, five volunteers from the NGO would conduct an hour-long workshop with these children after school hours. These workshops would involve conversations, short films and stories and were aimed at weaning the children away from drugs. Purnima even visited the homes of these children with her SMC members to understand their situation better. She found out that most of their parents were daily wage labourers who had no time for their children. Some of them were drug addicts themselves. Purnima began a dialogue with the parents and counselled them. Her school's SMC also started a "meeting point" outside school where students were encouraged to play games, exercises, take part in competitions, etc. To motivate, students were given small gifts like a toothbrush and toothpaste. These activities stimulated the children and helped them in their process of recovery. Additionally, Purnima also appointed some students who would support these children, so that they wouldn't take to drugs again. Two students, however, were seriously addicted and had to be sent to de-addiction centres. Purnima even received threats as some of the addicts were connected to the local mafia. However, she remained undeterred, largely because she knew she had the cooperation and support of her SMC. Over time, 23 out of the 25 students were completely out of drugs and started coming to school regularly.

Purnima has faced several roadblocks while working in her school, but it has done little to dampen her drive and motivation. Every time an ex-student comes to visit her and touches her feet, she is reminded of the significance of her mission and of the immense responsibility she has of shaping the future of thousands of children.

A New Look for an Old School

Anita Bharti has been teaching in Delhi's government schools for over 25 years now. When she looks back at her journey so far, she realizes the debt of gratitude she owes her parents for helping her become the person she is today. Anita grew up in a family with limited means and both her parents were less educated. Yet, they provided her an environment where education was valued and her aspirations were nurtured. Pursuing an education against all odds was an immense struggle; but the struggle also pushed her to strive harder. Anita studied in a Government school in New Delhi. Scaling one milestone after another, she eventually became the HOS(Head of school) of Rani Chennamma Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Jahangirpuri. In her tenure of over two years, she has drastically transformed the school, which is reflected by the several accolades she and her school has won.

Anita, however, credits all the success stories of her school to her school's SMC who have worked tirelessly in ensuring the welfare of students in the school. Her SMC's biggest achievement has been supporting the renovation of the school's old building. Before Anita took over as the principal, the school's building was dilapidated and it posed a huge risk to the safety of students. While the government agreed to renovate the building, the process took a long time to happen. School's SMC members made several visits to the PWD offices to follow up on the work and to ensure that renovation began soon. Even though the budget for renovation got sanctioned, the actual work took a long time to materialise.

SMC members approached the local MLA with copies of all the required documents. They even approached officials in the Education Department. From the DDE (District) to the Education Minister all were approached. Due to their efforts, renovation eventually began and was completed, albeit with delays. When work was underway in the school, the students had to face several inconveniences because of the constant disturbance, and power supply cuts. But Anita told her students, "*Hamara ghar ban raha hai, toh thodi dikkat toh hogi*" (There will be a few difficulties, after all our house is being made). This sense of ownership that Anita and her SMC managed to engender in her school helped in building a community that supported and stood by each other.

Story from Rani Chennamma Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Jahangirpuri



When the renovated building was eventually ready, everyone was elated. Students were extremely happy now to study in a brighter building with large airy classrooms, comfortable desks, and clean toilets. Recently, a parent told Anita that her daughter was so happy when she returned home one day that she kissed her and said, “*Mummy, humare class mein naye desk aaye hai*” (Mummy, we have new desks in our classrooms now). According to Anita, the renovation of the new building also significantly improved attendance in the school.

Anita Bharti considers, the renowned social reformer and educationalist Savitribai Phule as her source of inspiration. She says that she would be immensely grateful if she can create even a fraction of the impact that Savitribai had on women’s education in the country. When Anita interacts with her students, she sees a reflection of her childhood in them. This sense of empathy and compassion drives Anita to relentlessly work towards providing them a good education, so that they too can dream of a better future – much like she did, several decades ago.

A Garbage Dump is Transformed into a Garden

The Chauhan Bangar Nagar Nigam school isn't easy to find. However, when one asks where the Gaddhe Wala School is, residents will show the direction to this school located in the midst of the narrow and congested lanes of Seelampur. This is the only MCD Urdu primary school located in the densely populated Muslim-dominated area. The school caters to thousands of children who come from very poor families. Aliya Khatoon is a teacher in this school. Her childhood was intimately connected to the school, as her mother was the Principal here and she used to visit it often then. Many years later, when she started teaching here, she got an opportunity that she was seeking for long – to transform the school. She is the convenor of her school's SMC and she has been on a mission to bring about long awaited changes in the school along with her SMC team.

There was a huge garbage dump right outside the school. People would often throw their garbage near and within the school campus. The school premises were often occupied by men who would drink and gamble. Parents routinely expressed their concerns about



the hygiene and cleanliness of the school. They even stated that their children often got sick visiting such ambiances. On receiving these complaints, Aliya convened a meeting of her SMC to address these problems. The SMC organized rallies and conducted door-to-door visits explaining the effects of throwing garbage on the health of the children. A proposition was made to the councilor Asma Rehman to send private vans to pick up the garbage from the school's compound. The door-to-door visits continued three to four times a month reminding the residents to not to throw garbage in the school compound. The amount of garbage decreased with time but it never got removed.



Hence, in a meeting of SMC with the councilor, it was decided that if trees are planted in the school premises, it will provide a better environment for the students. The residents will also think before throwing garbage there. The councilor took charge of making a small park within the school compound. All parents and SMC members came to plant trees. Some swings were also installed within the park. The principal also took some strict measures and decided to lock the school gate at all times so that no one enters post school hours and checked entry of individuals during school hours.

The pile of garbage was removed and a small park was constructed. Asma and her SMC team's efforts ensured that the *gaddhe wala school* was transformed into a school with a beautiful garden. For Aliya, however, this is only a start – with the cooperation of school's SMC, she wants to ensure that the school she visited as a child becomes a school where she would also be sending her children.

A Sports Ground to Nurture Aspirations

On the northern margins of Delhi lies Bawana, one of the last remaining rural towns of Delhi. Comprising over 26 villages, it is also a hub of sports activity with several national level sportspersons hailing from there. **Bhagwan Singh Solanki** grew up in Pooth – one of Bawana's bigger villages – and completed his schooling from the Pooth Kalan School. His children too studied in the same school. Bhagwan cared deeply about the school because it was so intimately connected to his life's trajectory. When he found out that SMC elections were being held there, he decided to contest them solely with an intention to serve the school. He won the elections and was eventually elected as the Vice Chairperson of the SMC.

As an SMC member, Bhagwan was committed towards ensuring the all-round development of students in his school. As a member of the local community, he was also aware of the needs of the students there. As mentioned earlier, people were very passionate about sports and most of the children aspired to join the police or armed forces. However, the nearest sports complex to the school was about 15 km away. Bhagwan, along with the SMC team started seeking means to support students' interest for sports. He observed that most of the land around the school was unused. Students played there but the playground was not structured. Bhagwan decided to get a structured playground constructed for the students. He discussed the idea with the school's principal. He got appreciated and the Principal extended his support to the cause. They wrote a letter to Deputy Director (DD) of Sports stating that they had ample land available that could be turned into a track for students. The school received some special help from the Sports Authority of India which granted funds to the school for the creation of a track in the school premises. A grass track was constructed within a few months.

Story from Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalyaya, Pooth Kalan



Bhagwan and his team worked on this further by improving the school's sports facilities, giving utmost attention to the sports ground – taking proper care that the grass was well-grown, the ground was adequately watered and maintained. In addition to this, DD Sports also provided a coach for the students so that they could learn sports with the right techniques. Students were elated by these developments. Over a thousand kids in the community use the ground's facilities now. District-level events are also held in the ground every two to three months. When Bhagwan sees the changes he has managed to usher with the help of SMC and authorities, he feels a sense of immense pride. He says, *“Jab aap ek ped lagaate ho aur bahut saalon baad woh logon ko chaaya dene lagta hai, toh bahut garv hota hai”* (When you plant a tree and after many years it starts providing shade to people, you are bound to feel a sense of pride). He proudly adds that none of this would have been possible without the cooperation of the school. While Bhagwan and his SMC worked hard on the ground, the school took charge of all the official correspondence and ensured that the paperwork was in place. He believes that such effective collaboration will only pave the way for greater transformation in the school. Finally, he says, *“School ki building banana bahut aasan hai, par usme shiksha ko sammaan dila paana ek bahut lamba safar hai”* (It is easy to construct a school building, but to help education achieve dignity in it is a long journey).

An Assessment of Four Schools



Kamal Sharma is an MLA representative in the SMC of Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya No. 1, Madipur located in West Delhi. Having grown up in the city, Kamal was elated to have gotten an opportunity to serve his community through his work. When the SMC conducted its first meeting, a number of issues were raised. From students' haircut to discipline in the school, all were listed. The principal said that, the major challenge for his school revolved around issues of learning levels of the students coming from municipal primary schools.

Students from four municipal primary schools sought admission to his school after being promoted to Class 5. It was observed that the reading levels of some of the students were not grade appropriate. The school decided to map the reading levels of each student before they are enrolled in the school. They even created an appropriate plan to improve their reading levels. This plan was in accordance with the provisions of Chunauti 2018 – the Delhi government's programme to improve learning, wherein students are classified into three groups (Vishwas, Nishtha, Pratibha) based on their reading levels.



ASER tool used for assessment

Along with the SMC team, Kamal visited the first municipal primary school on February 16, 2017. Assessment of approximately 55 students was conducted. Data for the same was noted and the report was shared. Later, the team visited the other three Municipal Primary schools for assessment. After conducting the baseline assessment, the SMC team got a sense of the students who will be studying in the school. This helped in designing an improved teaching plan that would be suitable for students across varied reading levels.

Impressed by the SMC's efforts, the school teachers of the MCD schools requested them to visit their school and to interact with their SMCs so that they can share their best practices. Kamal was glad that his SMC had managed to build a cross-learning platform for SMCs in his community, while also helping his school to develop an enhanced teaching process.

School Gets a New Teacher

Sandeep Panwar was known in his village for being a bright and illustrious student. He stood first in his district in the Class 12 examinations. He later pursued a Masters in Political Science and B.Ed. After Class 10, Sandeep financed his own education by taking tuitions of the kids in his neighbourhood but he never charged any fees from children coming from disadvantaged households. In fact, he found a great joy in teaching these kids; little did he know that the joy would return to his life few years later.



When Sandeep settled in Delhi with his family, he became an SMC Member in Government Boys Senior Secondary School, Moti Bagh; an all-boys school in the Delhi Cantt. area. When he started working in the school, he found that there was no teacher available in the political science department for classes 11th and 12th, as a result the economics teacher taught the subject to these classes. However, she too was transferred to another school, and then there was nobody left in the school who could teach the subject to the students. Shortage of teachers is a serious issue across government schools in India, severely crippling the mandate of the Right to Education Act. As of November 2017, 27810 teaching posts were vacant across government schools in Delhi.

Story from Government Boys Senior Secondary School, Motibagh



Seeking to address the issue, he personally went over to the principal and asked him to give him a chance to teach the students as he holds a postgraduate degree in the same subject, besides having prior teaching experience of five years. The principal agreed and accordingly Sandeep gave a trial lecture to the students which was appreciated by all the students. He started teaching regularly after that; devoting one hour to Class 11th and Class 12th until 29th August 2017. He was surprised that after all these years, he still had such a strong grasp over the subject; which was substantiated by the praise and adulation he received from his students.

All the students who took class 12th exam passed with flying colours and were extremely grateful to Sandeep for his selfless work. Sandeep, too felt overwhelmed and proud of this success. He was elated that he could contribute, albeit in a minuscule way, by helping the children to create a better future for themselves.

Self-defence for Girl Students



Arun Kapoor is an SMC member in Government Co-ed Secondary School, Saraswati Garden. He is always ready to ensure the all-round development of children in his school. Arun has endeavoured to utilize his years of experience to help the school in myriad ways.

In November 2016, he decided to conduct self-defence workshops for girls studying in his school. During his discussions with the principal, he found out that as per a government circular, it was mandatory to conduct one self-defence session with the Delhi Police division after school hours, in every school. After asking many students and teachers, he found that no such workshop was organized in the school. He discussed the logistics of the workshop with the school principal. One of the foremost challenges for Arun was to ensure the security of girls after school hours. In addition to this, procuring the consent of students and arranging logistics were the main challenges. Arun decided to address these challenges and to conduct the workshop in the school premises after the school hours. He got the cooperation of the Principal and the other school staff. He coordinated with the self-defence team, the principal and the staff members. He asked the teachers to send a written note in the diary to inform the students' parents. Within a week, teachers received No Objection Certificates from the parents.





This school is in a residential area. Children usually come from the area called Mayapuri. Parents are generally labourers, many of them work in the furniture market.

Ms. Samiksha, physical education teacher arranged for carpets to protect the students from the cold. He also arranged for a mic and sound system for the workshop. The principal stayed in the school during the workshop to ensure the safety of the children. The girls were able to learn self-defence techniques from the black belt trained team of the Delhi Police Division. Students found the workshop very helpful and did very well in the session. They were even invited to an event organized by the Delhi Police to exhibit their skills. The success of the workshop inspired Arun to undertake many more such initiatives in the school. He has accomplished many such initiatives with SMC. He believes that as long as one follows a positive attitude and chooses to work with collaboration and not with hostility, change isn't too difficult an ideal to pursue.

The Second Gate for the School

Ashok Suryavanshi owns a clothing shop in Gandhinagar, Delhi. At a very young age, he lost his father and was burdened with responsibilities. He couldn't complete his education, but he continued to remain passionate about educating others in his community. He said, “Aadmi jab kisi cheez se vanchit reh jaata hai, toh woh chahta hai ki kisi aur ke saath aisa na ho”. He got an opportunity to transform his passion into something meaningful when he became an SMC member of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Yamuna Vihar as an MLA representative in 2015.

After joining SMC, he visited the school assigned to him on a weekly basis. One day, he visited the school during closing time at 12.40 pm. He saw many boys standing outside the school gate, waiting to enter the school for the evening shift. As soon as the bell rang, all the girls rushed out of the school gate. When most girls had left school, the boys started running in, to enter the school. However, some girls were still in the school. It was observed that the boys tried to rush in while the girls were trying to leave. There was chaos and girls students were saved from getting hurt by some teachers and Ashok Suryavanshi. This incident left Ashok wondering if he could help prevent such accidents in the future.



Story from Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Yamuna Vihar



When enquired, he came to know that the school had another gate that remained closed. He suggested to open the gate. The Principal reported that several people were against this proposal. The second gate opened in front of a posh locality and was often used as a parking space. The residents were unwilling to have government school students thronging the area. A meeting was arranged with the local MLA, the RWA of the locality and the school authorities. In the meeting, the RWA president angrily asked Ashok, why he cared about the gate when his own children didn't even study? Ashok calmly responded that, his 4500 children studied in the school and he cared about each one of them. The meeting ended inconclusively but Ashok didn't give up. He wrote many complaints to the higher authorities. After some months, the principal got transferred. The new HOS of the school agreed to Ashok's proposal. He facilitated a meeting of the SMC Vice chairperson Sh. Vinod sharma, other SMC members, 1 local member of the colony, HOS, ACP of the local police and SDM. After this meeting, the SDM issued challans to 44 car owners because they were parking in a "No Parking" area and announced that no cars could be parked in front of the second gate of the school. After six months of efforts, the second gate was repaired and opened for the girls to exit at the closing time of the school. Girls could now leave the school safely without fear of any stampede or harassment.

Small steps like this often have a huge impact on the learning of children and with Ashok's determination and SMC's perseverance this was possible. He, however, humbly says that this is only a start and there is a lot that is left to be achieved.

A Safer School for Girls

Shreya Aggarwal moved to Delhi 20 years ago with her family. She studied in GGSS School, Vivek Vihar Phase 2 from Class 6 to Class 10. Few years later, when she found out about School Management Committees, she decided to join it and became an SMC member in the very school where she studied.

One of the problems in that school ever since she was studying was that the boys from surrounding areas would stand in front of the school gates after the school got over. Both parents and students felt that this was very unsafe for the students. Shreya talked to the parents and assigned two SMC members to stand near the gates after school. The pair was given a duty for six days, and every week a new pair of SMC members would stand at the gate to ensure that no boy misbehaved. They would also record videos of boys who misbehaved or passed comments and stalked them, and talked to them personally. Shreya also sought help from civil defence volunteers from nearby areas who helped in monitoring the gates. The entire process took about six to seven months. They even talked to the police to put barricades on the road in front of the school to manage the traffic. Now, after months of hard work, the parents and students feel safer, as boys don't stand in front of the gates



Story from Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Vivek Vihar



anymore.

In her tenure of over two years, Shreya has brought about several changes in the school. Today, when Shreya looks back at her school days, she clearly remembers the classrooms within tin sheds, having no desks. Many of the students used to faint in the scorching heat when classes were conducted outside. Today, when she sees students studying in comfortable classrooms with modern amenities, she feels glad about the transformation the school has gone through. Along with that, she also sees the

Healing from a Tragic Incident

transformation that took place within herself in the same time.

Dinesh Kalia has spent his entire life so far in Nangloi, a locality in West Delhi. He knows the area very well and has been involved in several outreach and charitable activities there. When he found out about SMCs, he decided to become a part of the SMC in Government Boys Senior Secondary School, SP Road, Nangloi. He is an SMC member in the school for over three years now and has worked very closely with the administration to support the school's functioning.

In 2016, an incident occurred that sent shockwaves not just in the school, but across the country. Two students from the school stabbed their teacher to death in front of their classmates, after one of them was rusticated for low attendance. Both the students were arrested and the teacher's kin were awarded compensation by the Delhi government. However, the horrific incident sullied the atmosphere of the school. Distraught and angry, teachers staged protests in the school and in the locality. Parents too feared the safety of their children and the classes were conducted under a shadow of fear and gloom. The principal of the school resigned and a new principal was assigned to the school. He reached out the school's SMC members,



seeking their help in normalizing the situation in the school. He requested them to urge students and staff members to return to the school.

Dinesh, along with the other SMC members talked to the teachers to persuade them to stop their agitation and let the school return to normalcy. The teachers eventually agreed and resumed their duties. The principal asked the SMC members to talk to other parents to send their children to school regularly, now that the situation was getting back to normal. Dinesh and the other SMC members personally visited the homes of children and assured parents that they needn't worry about the children's safety and that they should start sending their children to school now. He also met the station house officer (SHO) and Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), urging them to improve vigilance in the school and to ensure that police patrols the school area regularly. He also spoke to MCD officials and got all unauthorised parking eliminated around the school.

Slowly, the school limped back to normalcy and the students started attending their classes regularly. Despite the distressing events of the year, there was a 26% improvement in the 12th class result in comparison to the 2016 results. The school building is now getting renovated, and Dinesh is glad that his SMC could help everyone in healing from the tragic episode and in moving towards a more peaceful and conducive learning environment.

A School Gets Cleaned Up

When Ravindra Singh was growing up he had to walk two and a half kilometres every day to reach his school. The school didn't have a roof and their classes were conducted in the field; they even had to carry their own mats from home. With his perseverance and grit, Ravindra traversed a journey from a small town to the School of International Studies in JNU. He is currently a researcher on urban history based in Mehrauli.

When Ravindra was studying in JNU, he was walking past a government school in Mehrauli with his wife, and was distressed to see its sorry state. Little did he know that several years later, he will get an opportunity to become a part of the school's SMC as a social worker. On joining the SMC, Ravindra was determined to change the school's landscape and to create a positive learning environment for students. When Ravindra started visiting the school, he saw that school was filthy and unclean. He found out that school had not been cleaned for a long time. The buildings were not even whitewashed and the school grounds were piled with garbage. The funds assigned for maintenance of school property were being used for irrelevant issues without the required permissions. He couldn't fathom how students could pursue education in such an environment.

Story from Government Boys Senior Secondary School No.2, Mehrauli



Ravindra decided to intervene in the issue. He spoke to the school's principal and to the other SMC members. He approached the District Director of Education and urged them to take some action. In the school's SMC meetings, he discussed ways of providing a clean campus and better sanitation for students. He managed to get the consensus of all the SMC members. Due to SMC's efforts, the authorities conducted an inspection of the school and within no time, work began. The cleaning staff in the school became more vigilant and started taking greater care of the school's cleanliness. Within a year, a dilapidated and crumbling school was radically transformed.

Ravindra said that this change would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the SMC, which have helped in establishing democracy within the school. He feels that schools are the most critical institutions of our society, because of the far-reaching impact that they can have and hence they require our investment and care. *"Dal-roti to poori duniya kamaati hai, par desh ki agli peedhi ke liye kaam karna hum sab ki naitik zimmedari hai"* (Everyone in the world works for their daily meals, but it is our moral responsibility to work for our country's next generation), he says.

Efforts for a more Comfortable Winter

Rajender Kashyap was born and brought up in Delhi's suburban area. His children studied in government schools and he used to be a part of the Vidyalaya Kalyan Samiti (VKS) then. Rajender's tenure in the VKS gave him a deep insight into the functioning of government schools and strategies to address school issues. When he came to know about the formation of SMCs in Delhi, he decided to become a part of it and enrolled himself as a social worker in the SMC of Palam Village School.

On one of his school visits in December when the temperature of Delhi was around 12 degree celsius, Rajender was disturbed to see that many students were out of assembly line for not wearing sweater. He witnessed a similar scene on several of his future visits. He wondered why the students would not wear sweaters in the biting cold.

On discussing the issue with teachers and students, he found out that most students were from unauthorised settlements and could not afford uniform sweaters. Rajender decided to promptly address the issue. He first asked the teacher convenor Mr. Md Haroon to make a list of students who could not afford the uniform. Within three days, a list of 100 students who could not afford the uniform was ready. He called his friend who was a supplier of school uniforms. He ordered the required uniform sweaters and paid for them from his pocket.

65 sweaters were supplied almost immediately. During the school's Annual Day function, Rajender requested the Deputy Director of Education (DDE), Mr. Ved Ram Verma, to distribute the sweaters to the needy students. On the DDE's intervention, a provision was created wherein students who still didn't have sweaters could go to the sweater supplier's shop and collect their sweaters on showing a slip stamped by the school's principal. Rajender goes on to add that the school's cooperation was crucial in ensuring that the entire process was carried out smoothly and all needy students got sweaters for themselves.

According to Rajender, students now come to school regularly and with a sense of dignity and pride. Whenever he takes rounds of the school along with the principal, many students approach him and touch his feet. Deeply moved by their respect, he was inspired to work even harder to ensure that the students are able to get good education and secure a better future for themselves.



Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya is situated in a residential area in Palam village, Delhi. The school has approximately 1023 students. Most students come from low income families of migrants, who are labourers.

Intervention During Pandemic



How do the SMC members of the school establish connect with their students during the Pandemic Covid-19 ?

The outbreak of pandemic Covid-19 has affected every sphere of life; education is no exception to it. In Delhi the government has announced that schools and educational institutions can opt for online learning. However, several stakeholders have pointed out that many students could not attend these classes due to lack of internet access and/or smartphones and computers at home. Schools in Delhi have made a number of interventions to reach out to the students. These interventions could be inspiration for other schools and the stakeholders.

As it was decided that students from KG to class 8 will be given one worksheet each with questions, tasks or activities on basic reading, writing, understanding, basic numeracy, and happiness curriculum via WhatsApp. But, about 20% of students do not have access to WhatsApp. For such students, parents were asked to come to the school and collect the learning material and worksheets for their wards. In this regard the SMC members helped to build a connection with the parents of the school and update the WhatsApp groups and lists of parents whose children are not available on these groups.

The SKV No. 2 J Jhangirpuri school got the support of active SMC members to take remote learning initiatives of the school to the community. Though it was not possible for them to fill the gap created by the digital divide, their efforts helped the school to bridge the gap.

Schools along with the active support of their SMC members tracked the students who have been inactive on WhatsApp class groups. They helped teachers to reach the unreachable by a one-on-one interaction with students over phone for those who don't possess smartphones. The SMC members made remarkable contributions to ensure that their learning continues.

In this way SMC was able to establish a strong connection with learners and their family. These small group interactions also helped in creating spaces online and in-person where learners felt safe, had a sense of belonging and could see themselves as an added value to the school and community.

For some learners, there was a lack of support at home as the mobile phone was with their father only and it was available to them in the evening time when they were back from their workplace. Learners have to manage their work accordingly. In this way these SMC members were able to reach about 80 percent students of the class to build a connection with them. The HOS of the school paid gratitude to the SMC members for their cooperation and dedication for the school.

The teacher convenor Mrs. Pooja Gupta shared that in the month of April COVID-19 cases were drastically rising in India, at the same time the commencement of the new session started at the school. The major concern of schools was how to teach the learner, especially those whose contact number was not available -“Reaching the Unreached”.

SMC members shared that it was very difficult for them to physically meet the learners at home and motivate them to take worksheets. Many times they were not able to meet the parents, as due to covid protocols streets were locked and some parents were not interested to listen to them.

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

One of the key functions of SMCs is to make an annual School Development Plan (SDP) as part of its school monitoring and assessment. According to PACS India, SDPs normally cover the following areas:

School access – is the school within 1km (for Primary) and 3km (for Upper Primary) of all elementary-aged children in the community?

School coverage – are all children aged 6–14 in the community in school?

Physical infrastructure – does the school have appropriate infrastructure (including well-lit classrooms, learning resources, a mid- day meal preparation room and separate toilets for girls and boys) to ensure it can function effectively?

Teachers – are there enough teachers to meet the RTE ratio of 1:30–35 and have the teachers received training?

Retention, promotion and learning – how are children being taught, and are children achieving in line with expected academic levels?

In Delhi, SMC members are trained by SCERT in collaboration with Saajha (NGO) on various aspects of the SDP through several activities. In the training sessions, members are trained on the roles and responsibilities of SMCs, creating platforms for sharing the work of SMCs, preparing an SDP and on building effectiveness of SMCs. The training content goes through various stages of finalizing, prototyping, and vetting. It includes the training booklet and cue cards for resource persons. After the content is prepared, master trainers are trained to conduct effective sessions. These trainers are then assigned schools where they are supposed to train SMC members. A wide variety of activities to be conducted are included in the booklet shared with them. At the end of the training session, all the SMC members prepare a plan which they then implement in their respective schools in collaboration with their SMCs.

A New Vision for the School

*Nagar Nigam, Water Works School is located in Wazirabad in North Delhi. The school has a staff of 5 teachers, 9 classrooms and 200 students and is led by **Rajni**, who has been the school's principal for five years.*



The school's SMC had been conducting meetings and events, but no structured plan was in place to assess the progress or plan future interventions. The need to structure efforts to deal with various problems of the school and have a need-based plan led to the development of a School Vision Plan (SVP). In an SMC meeting, all the SMC members agreed that a plan needs to be developed for future interventions. A list of the school's needs was chalked down. These needs were: improvement of mid-day meals, curbing absenteeism, enhancing learning levels of students, etc. The team of SMC members zeroed in on the top three needs, based on which a plan was developed. These were learning levels of the students, absenteeism, and increasing admissions of children.



An action plan elaborating the next steps and the timelines of the tasks was chalked out. Responsibilities were distributed to the stakeholders; teachers were tasked with improving learning levels; SMC members were issued instructions to increase admissions to plan door-to-door visits to reduce absenteeism in the school. Two review meetings were conducted to evaluate the progress made by the SMC in November 2016 and February 2017. The pre-test to assess learning levels was done in November 2016 and the post-test was done in March 2017.

Convincing the parents to send their children to school was a challenge in the beginning. A detailed School Vision Plan was made by the school that focussed on the overall development of students. The SMC was not only successful in getting new students admitted to school but also in getting students who had dropped out to enrol again.

According to Rajni, the credit for these changes goes entirely to her school's teachers and SMC members who worked hard within and outside the school to ensure that the vision they had envisaged for the school is realized.

READING MELA/ LEARNING INTERVENTION

Reading Mela was a community outreach program organized by the Directorate of Education and actively led by School Management committees (SMCs) in schools, parks and other community spaces in Delhi. Besides monitoring the working of the school, the major function of SMCs is to conduct outreach programs in their community to raise awareness in parents/guardians on the regularity in attendance, apprise them of the learning levels of their children, and their ability to learn in simple and creative ways. Reading Mela is one such unique community outreach program conducted in schools, parks and other community spaces, where students from the neighborhood participate along with their parents in fun reading activities. The primary focus was to aid and supplement the efforts of the DoE schools to achieve the goal of better reading skills for all children. Therefore, through Reading Melas, SMCs aim to build an ecosystem of learning in and around the community by bringing together parents and the community as a whole to help achieve the common goals set under the “Every child can read” plan.

In 2016, Reading melas were conducted at approximately 902 locations across Delhi. SMC members played a crucial role in ensuring its success. SMCs, in their meetings, voluntarily proposed, discussed and approved the modalities of organizing the mela in their community. One non-official member of the SMC was designated as Reading Mela Coordinator. With the help of their schools, volunteers, and other members in their community, SMC members arranged for reading material, books, chart sheets, crayons, and other stationery. On the basis of the reading material assigned to them, they conducted reading sessions with students and parents, as well as facilitated peer learning. On receiving an overwhelming response for this outreach program in the communities, and the increasing numbers of parents and children participation, SMCs sought help from different members of the community from different walks of life – students, teachers, parents, NGOs, business persons, retired officials, doctors, engineers, musicians, housewives, etc. who were in a position to volunteer for 2–4 hours in these events and bring in their different skills and expertise in interacting with participating parents and students, and made it a successful educational outreach program. By the end of the mela, SMC members were able to engage approximately 100000 students and 50000 parents. Crucially, the mela was successful in engendering a culture of reading among communities in the school and establish the role of SMC in building links between the school and the community it is placed in.

A Reading Mela in Old Delhi

The meandering bylanes of Old Delhi are as familiar to **Mehtab Raahi** as the lines of his palm. His school education was completed in a government school at Matia Mahal. Mehtab recalls studying in classrooms with no desks, having teachers who barely ever taught them and getting no exposure to the world outside their community. These experiences motivated him to work in his community to ensure that children of the present generation are able to secure a better future for themselves. In November 2015, he became an SMC member in a school in Matia Mahal and started working for the school's development. Currently, he is part of the SMC at SBV, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi.

In 2016, when SMCs were organizing reading melas in schools and communities, Mehtab felt that he too should organize reading melas for some schools, especially for girls' schools. The principals of a few schools in Matia Mahal area, however, were reluctant about this idea.



Story from Nagar Nigam, Water Works School, Wazirabad

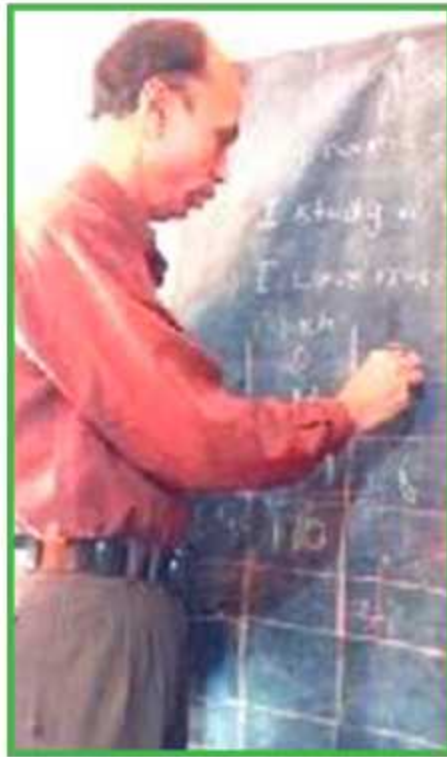


Refusing to give up, Mehtab mobilized teams from three schools in the Turkman Gate area and approached a night shelter to let them use the hall to run the reading mela for a few hours in the mornings on Sundays. His team got the permission to hold the mela for about three months. The hall where Mela would be held was decorated using pictures, craft items, etc. The mela was organised from 10 am to 12 pm on Sundays, for about three months, starting November 2016. More than 100 kids attended the mela, and some parents also came to attend it. Efforts were taken by the SMC members so that the children develop the habit of reading independently. Students realized the areas where they could improve, and above all, they developed the confidence to read. By the end of the mela, there was a significant improvement in the reading capabilities of children.

Buoyed by the success of the reading mela, Mehtab is brimming with ideas to make education accessible and fun for all. A familiar face in his community now, Mehtab says he will rest only once all the schools in Matia Mahal are of an exceptional standard.

A Tuition Centre for the Community

Wasim Akram Farooq grew up in Aligarh and went to school there. Financial difficulties forced him to give up his education and move to Delhi to work. He has two children, both of them study in government schools in Punjabi Bagh. Ever since his children joined school, Wasim has been closely involved with the school's management, initially as a part of the PTA and eventually as an SMC member. It not only helps him to keep an eye on his children, but also be supportive in the school's functioning. He says, "Until you begin questioning practices, no change is going to happen".



Once, Wasim was looking for tuitions for his children, but couldn't afford any due to the high fee. Hence, he thought of starting a tuition centre for students from underprivileged backgrounds. He hastily put up a board outside his home titled "Samaj Sevi Sansthaan" and started teaching kids. The centre is now being run in his home. His son and two other teachers from the community teach there daily, from 4pm to 6pm. Approximately, 70 children attend Wasim's classes, of whom eight to nine children do not go to school.



Wasim eventually wishes to start a not-for-profit organisation with 25 of his close friends and acquaintances. He is planning to name the NGO “Samaj Sevi Sansthan” which would primarily help kids coming from economically weaker backgrounds. These 25 members, along with Wasim currently contribute a small amount per month which is used to pay the two teachers teaching at the tuition centre. He hopes to reach out to more children and teach them for free through his centre.

In his school and in his community, people often say this about Wasim’s resourcefulness - *“Jo kaam koi nahi kara paata, use aap kara lete ho”*. You get such work done which nobody is able to do). Sometimes, however, Wasim’s children get irked by his work and ask him why he has to do so much for everyone. He tells them, *“Zindagi mein jab aapko roti, kapda aur makaan mil jaaye toh kamaana band kar dena chahiye, aur doosre ki madad karna shuru kar deni chahiye.”*(When you are able to earn enough for food, clothing and shelter; then you need to stop and start helping others in society.)

PARENT TEACHER MEETINGS

Parent Teacher Meetings (PTM) are an important medium to establish a meaningful dialogue between parents and teachers so that they can collectively create a conducive environment of learning for the children at school and at home. The Delhi education department organizes mega PTMs – simultaneous PTMs are held across all schools on the same day to facilitate this important conversation.

SMC members play a very important role in reaching out to the community by personally visiting homes and ensuring their presence at the meeting. SMC members also hold meetings with teachers before the PTM to discuss what issues must be brought up during the PTM. On the day of the PTM, SMC members set up helpdesks near the school to address queries or concerns that parents may have. SMC members also give tips and suggestions to parents on aiding children's learning at home. SMC members also ensure that refreshments are served to all parents who visit the PTMs.

In addition to the Mega PTMs, SMC members also routinely organize PTMs for specific classes and/or to address particular issues. For example, PTMs are held to assess the reading level of children or to support other important process in school. Because of the involvement of SMCs, parents attendance is easily ensured and parents also feel welcome whenever they visit the school.

A PTM to Assess Reading Levels

Lalita Aggarwal is an ex-banker and researcher with over 16 years of experience working in a bank. She holds MSc in Biochemistry from Delhi University. Once Lalita's children settled down and started working, she decided to join an SMC to give back to society. For the past three years, she has been working in the Shayama Prasad Mukherjee SKV CR Park, as a social worker. Lalita distinctly remembers the first SMC meeting in her school. Most of the members were hesitant to even speak up when they entered the principal's room. Lalita saw that there was a power differential between the parents and the school administration. Lalita's support to the SMC proved crucial in empowering the other parents to raise their voice whenever they felt the need.

In December 2017, Lalita decided to conduct a PTM in her school to assess the reading levels of students of 6th class, and to discuss with parents how they can support their children's learning at home. Initially, she was met with some resistance as the school had conducted learning level assessments a few months ago. The principal was also worried that pre-boards were just around the corner and that the school couldn't afford to conduct a PTM with such constraints. Lalita reasoned that it was a good opportunity to communicate with parents their children's need and how they can help each child. She also assured the principal that the SMC team would take complete responsibility of conducting the PTM and the school would also not be disturbed.



Story from Shayama Prasad Mukherjee Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya CR Park



The SMC team finally got the permission to conduct the PTM and they were allocated two rooms for it. The attendance of parents wasn't very high as most of them were daily wage labourers who couldn't afford to miss a working day. But, what was heartening was that siblings of many students studying in higher classes came to the PTM. Lalita and her team assessed the students using the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) tool, and other SMC parent members talked to the parents and told them how they could help their children.

Lalita plans to follow up on the PTM by conducting regular reading sessions with the students. On seeing her determination and dedication, several people ask her if she gets any financial benefits out of her work. But she responds by saying that the only benefit she receives is the love and gratitude of the students, which have made her a very rich person. She says that people go to temples to seek salvation. But the work that she has done with her SMC gives Lalita all the solace that she needs. For her, it is the highest form of service to the God.

MID-DAY MEAL

The Mid Day Meal Programme aims to supplement the initiative launched under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to universalize elementary education. Under this scheme, all students of government and government-aided schools are served free lunches on all working days. This scheme aims to fight child hunger and malnutrition to increase enrolment and attendance in government schools. This scheme was launched in 1995. Though it has undergone several changes since its inception, it has significantly reduced drop out levels over the years as well as improved health indicators among children.

In Delhi, mid-day meals are supplied on all working days by service providers, and the quality and quantity of the meals is strictly prescribed by the government based on studies and precedents. SMC members are required to monitor the implementation of the mid day meals in their schools. Sadly, the implementation of this scheme is far from perfect. As reflected in the stories of the SMC members in this book, close monitoring of the meals served can dramatically improve the quality of the meals, thus leading to the children enjoying their meals and eating a more nutritious lunch.

Monitoring the quality and quantity of mid day meals is no mean feat. It can only be possible with the concerted efforts of the school authorities and SMCs.

The Right to an Adequate and Healthy Meal

As a student, Dr Lalita Gupta's ambition to become a teacher someday was so strong that even her friends used to call her 'Madam'. Staying true to that yearning, she became a teacher in an MCD school in the city after her studies. Eventually, she started teaching in a DoE school and finally became the Vice-Principal of SKV Adarsh Nagar, a post she continues to hold till date.



When SMC was introduced in DoE schools, Lalita Ma'am was apprehensive about the value they will be able to add to the functioning of the school. However, over the years, her doubts were put to rest as she began to work more proactively with her school's SMC towards the overall development of the school. Be it planning an Eco Club for the school or hiring an Urdu teacher, the SMC had been always available whenever their support was required in the school.

The key area of contribution of the school's SMC was towards distribution of mid-day meals (MDM) in the school. Lalita Ma'am felt that the number of meals sent to the school was not in proportion to the school's total strength. After a discussion in the SMC meeting, it was agreed that the vendor would be communicated the concern. Ma'am spoke to the vendor who assured to address the issue promptly. Two SMC members from the school also visited the contractor's kitchen and supervised the cooking process and the quality of food there.



Constant follow-up by SMC members assured that children in school were getting adequate and wholesome meals regularly. Even today, at the end of every meeting, the school's SMC members check the quality of the mid-day meal and supervise its distribution. Despite the changes, Lalita Ma'am feels that a lot more still needs to be done. According to her, providing silverware and rugs for children, increasing wages of MDM workers and an increasing number of MDM staff will go a long way in improving the mid-day meal programs across schools.

As Lalita Gupta walks into the twilight of her career, she is proud of the changes she has managed to bring about in her school with the help of her SMC. In her meetings with the SMC team, she continues to urge them to keep raising their voice and to work proactively towards improving the school. The prophecy of her school friends who called her 'Madam' was after all true and how!

ADMISSIONS

Under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, every child aged 6–14 years is guaranteed free and compulsory education. However, in schools across the country, there are several barriers to securing admission, ranging from lack of information among parents to the inefficiency of schools in handling a large number of applicants. In order to truly fulfill the mandate of the RTE, it is imperative that the process of school admissions be transparent, smooth and parent-friendly. With these objectives in mind, the Delhi government embarked on a mission to conduct admissions in over a thousand government schools in Delhi.

Cluster and zonal level committees were formed for admission into various classes. These committees included District Director of Education (Zone) and principals from schools in the respective clusters/zones. In a novel and disruptive endeavour in 2016–17, it was decided that SMC members should also be a part of these committees. There were several reasons that they were instrumental in ensuring this change. The RTE Act requires the involvement of SMC members in ensuring enrolment of children within their neighbourhood and bringing to notice any denial of admission. Additionally, SMC members are equipped to deal with the functionalities of schools in comparison to the other parents. The functions of the committee members allow them much deeper intervention into the school. Hailing from the same community as the other parents, SMC members are in an important place to ensure that the concerns and queries of all parents are addressed throughout the process.

However, it was necessary to first equip SMC members with basic knowledge of the admission process. Over 250 SMC members were trained by SCERT in collaboration with Saajha on various aspects of the process. SMC members also set up help-desks in their respective schools to answer parents' queries and to address their grievances.

Admission for Every Child



Ish Kumar Arora is a part of the School Management Committee of GGSSS D Block, Ashok Vihar-Phase 1. He joined the SMC with an aim to bring about a change in the condition of government schools in his locality. In spite of handling multiple business in several states, Ish ensures that he never misses an SMC meeting and is always available whenever the school requires him.

As a part of his responsibilities as an SMC member, he regularly visits communities to meet the parents of students in order to help solve their problems. During one such visit in April 2017, he found out that a school had refused to give admission to a child named Anjali due to non-completion of documents. Anjali's parents had not been able to procure the documents on time, as both her parents were working and were not very educated. Her father, Arvind was a laundry man. He was afraid that his child would have to waste one year because they had not been able to avail her documents.

Without delay, Ish went with Arvind to get the required Adhar card and other identity documents made. He then went to school with Arvind and Anjali. He submitted all the required documents and completed the entire formal process. This helped Anjali to get admission in school. In the school, there were several other people who had issues with admissions. Ish ensured that he helped each one of them.

Arvind now works in Dubai but, he sent a recorded 'thank you' message to Ish via WhatsApp to express his gratitude. Such messages have boosted Ish's confidence to work harder as an SMC member and to help more people. Every time, he visits his school, he feels a sense of immense joy when he sees the students whose admissions were facilitated by him. It is for this joy that Ish continues to work so selflessly in the school.

