

## **Program Profile: Education Outreach Program**

### **Overview**

The Ashraya Initiative for Children's Education Outreach Program is a project specifically designed to facilitate access to high-quality educational opportunities for 250 children from several Denotified (formerly "Criminal") Tribe slum communities in Pune, India. The program started in 2006 due to a pervasive lack of education in the Waghri slum, particularly among young children. Most had never been enrolled in school; others had dropped out after a few years to help support their families and spent their days begging on the streets. AIC enrolls the children in the most reputable public and private schools in the area, sponsors their school tuition fees, provides uniforms, shoes, school supplies, and nutritious packed meals. AIC also arranges daily transportation to and from the schools if they are not within walking distance. Additionally, all students in the Education Outreach Program are automatically eligible for free, comprehensive health and medical care coverage under the AIC Health Outreach Program.

Beginning in 2008 with a pilot group of students who were enrolled in an English-medium private school, the program has gradually shifted toward providing English-medium educational support, a growing trend in India. In 2009, the decision was made to begin phasing out Marathi-medium classes one year at a time, and since then all new students accepted into the program have been placed either into existing Marathi-medium classes (if the child is already attending school in standard 3 or above) or, for children not already enrolled in school, into the English-medium program at AIC.

Currently the Education Outreach Program provides educational support for children in Marathi-medium schools from grades 3 through college (as the students advance in school, one grade level is phased out of the program each year) and for children in English-medium schools from nursery school through grade 6 (as the students advance in school, the program expands by one grade level each year). In 2009, AIC started its own English-medium Pre-Primary School, which now educates more than 60 students spread over three grade levels – Nursery, Junior Kindergarten and Senior Kindergarten. Although all other students in the Education Outreach Program attend school elsewhere and come to AIC for tutoring and academic support, the AIC Pre-Primary School is a free-standing program that provides all the foundational instruction and support for students and prepares its students to enroll in external private or semi-private schools beginning in standard 1.

### **Daily Routine**

There are both before-school and after-school components to the Education Outreach Program. Beginning at around 5:30 in the morning, our Education Outreach Centre is transformed into a hub of activity, as the children arrive in batches (staggered according to school timings) for breakfast, showers (as none have running water in their houses) and school preparation with assistance from a team of AIC caregivers. The children leave for school from the Centre, and return to the Centre directly from school. During the after-school portion of the program, the children receive tutoring, homework help and exam preparation that follows their curriculums at their respective schools. This routine not only reinforces what they have learned in school and provides support for them to excel, it provides valuable structured time that is solely dedicated to their growth and development.

The AIC Centre has become a second home for these children - many arrive before sunrise and leave well into the evening every day – and serves as a safe haven where they can feel secure, appreciated and loved, no matter what turmoil and violence they face in the slums. Most of the children drop by the Centre on weekends as well, for as-needed additional tutoring sessions arranged by the teaching staff, extra-curricular activities such as arts and crafts, dance practice, puberty and sex education seminars for the older students,

educational fieldtrips, leadership camps, and cultural programs on holidays and summer/winter vacations. Many even just stop in and visit with the friendly faces that they know will greet them at the Centre. These friendly faces - the AIC Education Program staff - work tirelessly, frequently arranging additional tutoring and activity sessions in their free time, and have been selected not only on the basis of qualifications but also their unwavering commitment to seeing the children succeed. The Education Program staff is comprised of drivers, cooks, social workers, English-medium teachers, Marathi-medium teachers, caregivers, housekeepers, a kitchen manager, a Program Coordinator and the on-site Director.

### **Program Goals**

The goals of the AIC Education Outreach Program are:

1. To provide our children with the resources they need to attend school, because we believe that no child should be precluded from going to school for lack of basic school supplies, a clean uniform or shoes.
2. To provide our children with the support they need to have successful academic careers, because we recognize that, in addition to material resources, a great deal of academic, emotional, medical, community-based support is required for them to thrive.
3. To provide our children with the tools they need to prove to society that they can excel and become leaders in community irrespective of caste, gender and economic background.

The children in our program come from one of the poorest Denotified Tribe slums in all of Pune, and almost all are first generation learners. Yet despite the obstacles they face, we do not believe that these children can merely hold their own in academic settings; we believe they can excel. We accept nothing less than the highest quality educational opportunities for our children, and, based on their tremendous achievements and steadfast community support that we have seen thus far, are confident that they will go on to attend college and pursue careers in the coming years.

In the past five years, this program has grown from an initial group of 12 girls in 2006 to upwards of 250 boys and girls in 2012. The Education Outreach Program program is vital to the mission of AIC and has become a pillar of hope, growth and development for the communities in which we work.