

## Notes on the Topsia Canalside Squatter Community



710 families, averaging 6 individuals per family, dwell in illegal shelters alongside the Topsia canal. The canal is a polluted waterway which has contaminated the ground and water in the area with heavy metals and other toxins. There are two drinking water taps, one at either end of the community, and these flow just twice a day, so residents need to queue to collect drinking and cooking water. Open defecation is the norm here as the few toilets that exist cannot be kept clean through a lack of running water. Residents avoid them.

The Topsia canalside community is one of Kolkata's "rag picker" communities. They are mostly Muslim and are migrants from other parts of West Bengal and northern India. They are generally Urdu speakers, illiterate and many lack identity documents and are therefore barred from accessing their rights and entitlements. Most of the families depend on rag picking for a livelihood, supplemented by exploitative piecework like chappal trimming.

Tiljala SHED has been working with the community for 30 years. It has built a community centre which has become the focus for child

education and protection, community meetings, Self Help Groups and food distribution and health camps. Every day 59 particularly vulnerable children attend the centre after school where they receive coaching, counselling and an understanding of their rights. Our trained staff are there to ensure that instances of abuse, exploitation or violence against the children are identified and dealt with. On Saturdays, thanks to generous donations from local businessmen and well-wishers around the world, Tiljala SHED arranges a langar (mass food distribution) to 450 people at the Topsia Centre.

In February/March 2017 corporate donor Supertron is installing a computer classroom in the centre and will provide computer training 5 days a week to the 59 children who attend our after school sessions.



At this point Tiljala SHED considers that both the need and the infrastructure now exist in Topsia to justify the introduction of this new program to enhance the educational opportunities for the children most at risk of dropping out of education.



**TRIMMING CHAPPALS EARNS AROUND Rs50 PER DAY**



**PREPARING FOR THE LANGAR IN THE TOPSIA  
COMMUNITY CENTRE**



**TOPSIA'S CHILDREN ARE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE, EARLY  
MARRIAGE, CHILD LABOUR, ILLITERACY, CRIME AND EXTREME  
POVERTY**

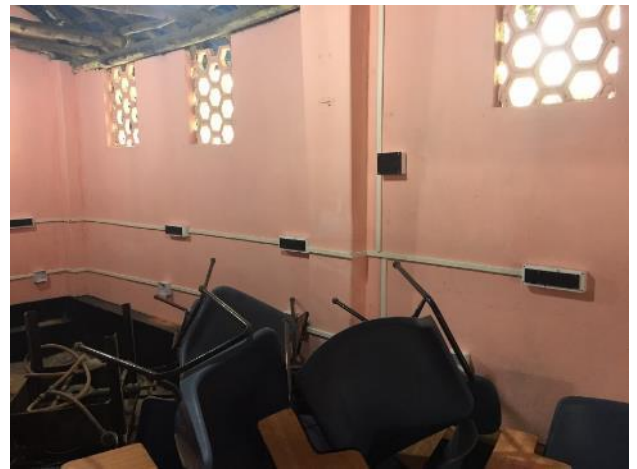


**WELL WATER IS CONTAMINATED. NOT FOR DRINKING**

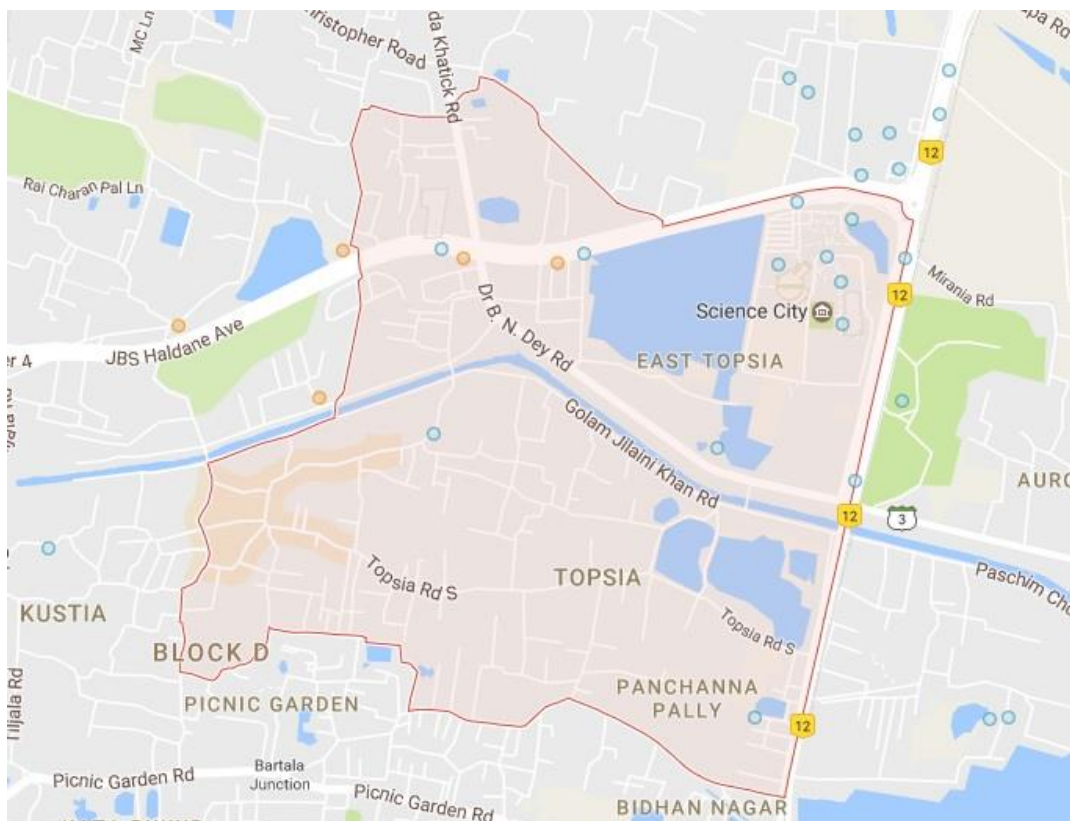
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**OUR TEACHER TABASSUM CONDUCTING AFTER SCHOOL COACHING IN  
THE TOPSIA CENTRE**



**INSTALLATION OF ELECTRICITY POINTS IN READINESS FOR  
NEW COMPUTER LAB IN THE TOPSIA CENTRE (MARCH  
2017)**



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