

Article in the Mint, The Wall Street journal by Rachana Nakra

Sushila Jadhav, 12, had never been to school until her parents came to work at K. Raheja Corp. Construction's Vivarea project, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai. She took care of two siblings while her parents laboured at construction sites. Today, her siblings are taken care of at the mobile creche on the site while she studies at the creche.

Expecting a dusty site area, with noisy children and jaded teachers, I head for the six-month-old residential construction site where at least 80 families work. But as Vasanthi Ghadi, a 58-year-old kindly but sharp programme officer, guides me to a large brick structure, I am in for a surprise. The school is noisy alright, like any place with at least 60 kids should be, but it's clean, airy and spacious, with cheerful artwork on the walls. Children of the migrant labourers, who live and work at the construction site, study, eat and play here till their parents return from work.

Mobile Creche aims to give these children an opportunity to be a part of mainstream society by providing day-care facilities for the smaller children and empowering the older ones through education. In the past 35 years, Mobile Creche has set up about 550 day-care centres at construction sites in Delhi, Mumbai and Pune. They keep a database of the children and build creches at as many sites as possible in these cities so that the children don't lose out on a stable environment even as they move from one construction site to another with their parents.

**The creche at the Vivarea project site has three rooms:** The first has babies (under three) lying in makeshift cloth cribs, sleeping or chewing contentedly on plastic toys, while two caretakers bathe and feed toddlers, play with them and teach them. The second room is for three-to-six-year-olds and the third for older children. These rooms double up as classrooms.

The class for the older kids has desks and benches and the walls are covered with artwork and diagrams. There are also two computers which are not yet functional. Children in this class are learning math, and I teach little Aparna to write the number 6 in Hindi. Soon, other children crowd around, demanding attention from the "new teacher".

"We are very strict about the teacher-child ratio, which can't be over 1:25," says Neeta Khajuria, general manager of the creche. Regular PTA meetings, called *chai* parties, are held to give parents detailed progress reports. One of the aims of this organization is to prepare the children for admission at local municipal schools, which is difficult for migrant parents to do on their own.

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