

## Visit to Salaam Baalak Trust (<http://www.salaamstreetkids.org/>)

*Elie Hassenfeld visited Salaam Baalak Trust on October 20, 2010. On November 8, 2010, Holden Karnofsky and Natalie Stone visited a second Salaam Baalak Trust center.*

### **October 20, 2010 visit**

#### **Background**

- The center is located right next to the Charni Rd station, on the East side of Marine Drive, ~100m south of Chowpatty. It's a drop-in center for street children in Mumbai.
- The center itself is hidden down a long driveway and is two small rooms in shack. The main room, which I was in, probably 15 feet wide by 35 feet long. There's also a smaller room used for computer classes, but I saw it only walking by it.
- I spent the hour talking with Dinaz (a trustee and Agnes a program person). We sat in the main room and talked while I took notes.
- There were about 10-15 kids in the room ranging in age from approximately 2 to 15. The kids were sitting together and playing. Some were reading. About halfway through my time there, the teacher sat down and read to them.
- At the end of our conversation, Dinaz mentioned that they're trying to build a corpus (I think that's an endowment) of 4 crore rupees (40m rupees). That will enable her to not have to fundraise anymore. So far, they've raised 90 lakhs of the corpus. (SBT's total annual budget is 50 lakhs.)
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#### **Conversation with Dinaz Stafford, Founder and Trustee**

**GiveWell:** Where do the street kids that you help come from?

**Dinaz:** Children migrate into Mumbai for many reasons, and we're the ones who work to prevent them from getting into prostitution, being trafficked, either into prostitution or other underworld activities. We're literally the stop for them between their home and other bad activities.

Our organization was set up because children have a right to identity and childhood, which they lose on the streets. We give them their childhood back and are protective of their needs. We give them education, food, and we're the ones who look after their health. We teach them things like niceness and goodness.

So, the kids need to be taught about what can happen to them on the streets so they don't go off with strangers who might offer them some money to take them to a hotel and photograph them or do other bad things.

We're a drop-in center, and anyone on the railway at Charni Road station can come here: if they're in need of food, want to go back home, if they're not sure what they want on

the streets. Our people help them, give them a place to stay, give them homes – we have a night shelter for boys and girls: 30 girls, 50 boys. If they exist on the streets, we teach them basic math and counting, so they don't go wrong with math. We do formal education, informal education.

Some children have parents and families who all live on the streets and all the children can come to us. Other children live in groups under the bridge and have no parents or families and they come to us. And, we have very little kids who come and we try to help and empower them to be on the streets because we can't offer them any alternative. [I think the lack of an alternative she's referencing is that SBT's night shelters are only for older children. This is mentioned below.] We want to empower them through learning and education.

[Introduces me to Agnes, the program person.]

Agnes is in charge of education programs in all five centers. She makes the children programs so they can go from level to level and helps them get into schools. At first, the kids are sent to government schools. But, the ones who are doing well, we pay for their education, and send them to private schools. We also spend on health, activities, sports, judo, music, dance, yoga. For all these things we need funds. Even to paint our center which just happened, we needed to specially raise funds.

We need to help make the center closed so filth doesn't come in. [The center has a metal roof over a cement frame, but there are openings at the sides of the roof – where the roof slants over the square frame.] We also want to build a little wash center.

This building [another youth center] around the corner is for lower-middle class/middle class children who can pay some fees. We fought for this location. Initially, someone put up this shed for us which cost 4 lakh rupees, but it now costs money to maintain it, get tea, computers ... it all costs money.

[Someone comes to the door]

She's a donor who wants to see if children have eaten food. It's very common in India for people to come and make sure kids have eaten. She had organized lunch with another social worker and wanted check that the food came and it was enough.

**GiveWell:** Where do these kids come from? What are their stories?

**Dinaz:** We have case files for each kid, in our main office.

**GiveWell:** Can you tell me about one child in the room?

**Dinaz to Agnes:** Tell him about [NAME].

[She points to a girl in the room.]

**Agnes:** She's physically challenged and a slow learner. She had a stroke and a very high fever when she was young. And, in her culture, the people don't believe in using doctors. They just do rituals. After they waited so long, she had lost sensation in her right side.

She has two brothers and a sister. Her mother is remarried. They live on the streets. Her parents don't neglect her, but, they just take care of her physical needs, like clothes and food. If she was lost from the streets, they wouldn't care. They could traffic her into prostitution.

**GiveWell:** Where does her family live?

They live on the beach [Chowpatty – right across the street from the center] in a plastic shack with a sheet on the beach.

They recently had to move out from the beach [after the Ganpati festival, the Mumbai city government forced residents that had set up temporary housing on the beach to move in an effort to clean up the beach], so now they hang around somewhere in Mumbai, and she comes into the center.

Her parents aren't educated. Her father was an alcoholic and abusive. Her mother remarried a man from the streets who protects his wife, so no one else can touch her. But, he cares more for his own children than [NAME]. For example, [NAME] needs regular physical therapy for her damaged right arm, but none of her family would take her every other day for physical therapy. And, we have a need for more workers to take kids like her to appointments. Initially, she was making progress and started using her right hand, but since we didn't have enough capacity, we couldn't keep taking her.

She's a little challenged, so even in her menstruation, we support her and help her. She doesn't know what's happening and that she's getting her monthly period her, so we help her and support her (even giving her pads).

We do all these little things. There are many instances of many children where we handle them individually.

[Another example, points to a boy in the back of the room.]

**Agnes:** This boy, once we explain things to him, he understands it very quickly, but he's not good at writing. He may be dyslexic. He doesn't have a mother; she died when he was young, and his father remarried a woman that won't take care of him. And she won't give him any food. He was totally neglected. Now, he's here and we helped him go to a private school. He's now in 8<sup>th</sup> standard, which is very good for him.

Recently, his father couldn't cope with him because [NAME] is now 14-15 years old and teenagers are hard to deal with. So, his father sent him to the aunt. But, the aunt's husband was on drugs, and would send [NAME] to Chowpatty to buy drugs for the uncle. Finally, [NAME] ran away from home, and came back here. We started counseling him

and he told the whole story. So, we had a big meeting with the aunt, uncle, and father, and they agreed not to send him to the beach anymore to buy drugs.

So, then they took him back again and were using him to do all kinds of odd jobs around the house. This child is a teenager and he loves to read. So, again he got frustrated and ran away and came back here. He told me I don't want to go back because of all the things they're making me do. So, again we had a big meeting with the aunt, uncle and father. So, we agreed he's not going back to the aunt and uncle. Now, he stays on the beach with his father, and the center supports the father, so the father can cope with him.

**GiveWell:** Stories like these are available for all children in the case files you mentioned?

**Dinaz:** Yes. For children who are here for a long time. We're a drop-in center, so a lot of kids just come by once for something very small. Sometimes kids come and just ask for water, and we'll give it to them without asking anything. If they come back more often, we'll ask some questions and take the name for the register.

We ask for a little story in case he wants to share; if he doesn't want to share, he might leave. He knows he can come and get what he needs without us asking him too much questions.

There are a lot of kids in this area. The train platforms and the beaches are a big attraction for kids running away from home.

Two years back, there was a small little child, around 18 months. During Divali season, a parent had just abandoned the child on the street, next to another sleeping child. And that parent had left her small child just next to some other child sleeping on the pavement. The other child, a boy, wakes up and takes the 18 month old home to get some clothes and then brought her to the center.

This child was very smart. She couldn't speak at all but was making signs towards a mobile phone, signaling that it was for a phone call. We took her to the police station and they put her in an institution. This is a government institution for absolutely deserted children. We can't cope with the youngest children. We have the night shelters for children ages 10-18.

Once boys and girls get to age 15, we help them plan their future. We give them vocational training. We've started do connections between employers and the kids, so they can work and receive a stipend to learn and earn. For example, the restaurant Indigo offered us that some of our boys can come to the restaurant as train to be waiters. At Indigo now, there's a waiter who was one of our children..

The thing is these kids have the potential, but there's no one to help them realize their potential.

There are so many dropouts of various kinds. It's the nature of how they live on the streets to cope. For example, you want a 17 year old girl who's been educated by us to have some profession, but she meets someone, and at the age of 18 she just decides to marry him. And we try to teach them about the tomorrows, but it's very tough.

[A boy comes to the door. Dinaz says, "A drop in from a big boy." He looks age 17. He's talking to Dinaz and Agnes in Hindi. Dinaz mostly stops talking to me to talk to the kid. After a while, she comes back to me and translates for me.]

He's working as an assistant carpenter. He's earning 9,000 rupees a month. Normally, our boys earn 4,000-5,000 a month. So we're very happy. That's very good. He's asking about the workers he knows from when he was here, a male social worker who we know but he's at the other center.

[Now, he's giving Agnes his telephone number. They're very impressed he has a mobile.]

**Dinaz:** [About the boy] He's someone who was here, but didn't want to study and was bright. Now, he's come back because he wants a little lunch.

His mother, she was a professional thief. She used to go into the ladies car on the train and steal. She stole a gold chain and was caught and put in jail. Such are the role models for them.

He's from a community, the "thieves community." It's the lowest in the rung of the tribals. It's the Pardhi community. This community is that of robbers and thieves because they're the poorest, worst off among the tribes. Even in villages, they don't own any land. They come from villages to Mumbai because they know they won't go hungry here. When children come here with their mothers, they're robbing or cleaning cars.

We have a group of students who come from the Cathedral School in Mumbai and they were working with children at the end of the street at the Zodiac Garden. A trustee saw them working, and one of the trustees realized, they're so many of them, why are they on the streets, can't we put them into schools. When they saw so many from one place, she went back to the villages they were all from and tried to put them back into schools.

Ours is the only organization that repatriates the families back into the village they came from into local schools. The government system of juvenile justice refers the kids to us to help put them into schools. And we spend on the teachers there to help them. We've told them we'll take the strain off you and spend to help.

During Ganpati, they come back to Mumbai because they can make money. During vacations, they come here to Mumbai and we see them at the center.

**GiveWell:** Where exactly are they from?

**Dinaz:** Sholapur – it's an 8 hour, overnight train from Mumbai.

Here, this community does difficult jobs like digging roads or tarring roads. A major occupation is selling a lime and chilis on the road. This is easy to sell since there's a superstition that lime and chilis helps spare the evil eye. They earn by buying whole sale and reselling. Or, they sell flower garlands or help on the beach with games and selling tea. If you go any evening to Chowpatty, you'll find all our children on the beach.

**GiveWell:** You send families back to the village? They want to go? Didn't they move to Mumbai?

**Dinaz:** For the parents, there's not much we can do. We give them guidance and help for medical. For children, we try to do everything. We help the children go back to the village to boarding schools. If they're here in the city, they're into begging and don't go to a formal school. They just get distracted and go to the streets and beg.

The parents realize that they didn't get a good education, and even the poorest of the poor know that education is the only way to rise up in society.

**GiveWell:** What do the parents think about their kids going back to the villages for school?

**Dinaz:** They support us because they can't do this alone. The father is normally an alcoholic or drug addict. But, the mothers know that the only thing she can do is educate them. So, we take them there and show them the school and they accept it. And, then once they accept it, now, anyone who comes from that area, everyone is told and they do that too.

[Another small boy arrives. He comes with his mother and she drops him off. Dinaz says, "We gave him the bag and water bottle he has."]

**Dinaz:** His father used to come to us. The mother brings him here because it's a nice place for kids before they go before they enter formal schools. [About the boy who's very neatly taking off his shoes and socks and putting them together outside the center's room.] He's so well-trained. We're not used to kids who are so good. Usually, they throw things around. He's been coming since last year, and how he's 4.

**GiveWell:** He seems pretty well off with a mother and father who care for him. Is it common for kids here to be in that situation?

**Dinaz:** Usually, most come from dysfunctional families where at least one parent is an addict. At least 90% of them don't have a responsible caring adult in the home. With him, his father and mother are good.

His father and mother want him to come here, which is very rare. His father had gone through this system, and he knows what we do. Now, he's working on the Ferris Wheel

at Chowpatty. There, to they push it manually. They live on the beach in a little shack. [I didn't ask if they still live there now that the city has moved people off the beach.]

[Another child comes up next to us.]

**Dinaz:** [About the boy] He knows all about computers. He saw my iPhone and knew it was from Apple. He's the technical guy. He's too smart.

[Dinaz asks him if he wants to talk to me in English. He looks like he does, but he's shy.]

**Elie:** How long have you been coming here? **Boy:** Since I was 2.

**Elie:** How old are you? **Boy:** 15

**Elie:** Do you like the center? **Boy:** Yes

**Elie:** Why do you like it? **Boy:** It's a very nice center. Games to play. Football.

**Dinaz:** He did an animation film for the holidays. He's technically very good. Any kids that come from early childhood, we make an impression on them. It's when they come at 7, 8, 10, that it's already harder. When they're a little older, they accept us, and they want to do what we teach and train, but there's something else that's more attractive for them, and we haven't found out how to really reach them.

**GiveWell:** You mentioned earlier that parents dope their kids to sedate them and make them easier to deal with? How did you find out about that?

**Dinaz:** We know about it because we see the kids sleeping and sleeping and sleeping and so, then we tell the mother to bring them in immediately in the morning, right when they wake up. After that, we see them so active and we know something had happened to them before.

**GiveWell:** What do kids do who don't come here?

**Dinaz:** They're just running around. They gamble, play cards. They play shells. You can see them on the beach. You can also see young adults doing the same thing. They're into drugs and alcohol.

**GiveWell:** Do you have a budget you could share with us? I didn't see it on your website.

**Dinaz:** I'm not sure whether we keep the budget there. We haven't uploaded it. We can speak at least the cost of the centers. Annually, we require about 50 lakh rupees to run our centers.

We've been around for 21 years and we want to be more professional, spend more money. All our workers are working for peanuts. Agnes got 5,000 rupees monthly when she started.

This lady [points to the teacher] used to be a helper and was just doing cleaning/washing, so we put her in a paraprofessional course and shifted her to this center. We had to shift her because at the other center, ppl thought she was just a helper; here she's an educator. She started with 700 rupees per month and now she gets 4,500 a month. And, she's working really hard.

**GiveWell:** What do you think of Magic Bus?

**Dinaz:** Magic Bus works with slum kids. Our kids are street kids. But, they take our children on picnics, give them football lessons and we encourage our children to participate. They're very professional. They do great work.

*The following are notes from our November 8, 2010 visit.*

### **Background**

- The center served as a day center similar to the one Elie visited, as well as a night shelter for girls 10-18.
- It also contained a balwadi (pre-school). We were told that this program serves a different population than the day/night shelter.
- The center consisted of an office, a large room used for activities during the day and sleeping at night, a hallway with storage for personal belongings and bedding, a balwadi room, and a bathroom.
- We were told that there is a core group of 28 girls who live in the center full time.
- Dinaz came late to our meeting (and explained that she had been held up by important program work, i.e., working with the children at the center). While we were waiting, we spoke with an American volunteer in the office.

### **Conversation with an American volunteer, Joan Cook-Titare**

**Joan:** I work in the career program. It's not vocational training; it's trying to link young adults directly with businesses. We select kids 17 and above and present them to industry. I am the coordinator between the case managers and the businesses. After 3 weeks of training provided by the business they go to the factory floor. Salaam Baalak checks in with them. The business pays a stipend.

One industry is cooking. We have a partnership with Indigo. It's a 10-month training, and the young adults come out with the equivalent of culinary training. Other industries are textile production and service for fine dining.

The target population here is street children. Many are living on the sidewalk. We know from studies that separating children from parents is way more harmful than having them stay with parents. So we try to help them without separating them. We help them finish their homework, stay in school, etc. Some parents say they're completely unable to look after the children.



The night center is here to help with safety.

Some children are technically slum children, not street children, but if their situation is bad enough, we will take them into the career program to help prevent them from becoming street kids. In general there are more programs out there for slum children than for street children - the latter is a really difficult population to work with. A lot of kids run away from home because they want some freedom; they don't like structure (bathing, showing up on time, etc.) There's a street culture. Seeing 20% of our kids finish a minimal level of schooling and get a job would be great.

Getting a job in Mumbai is not difficult. The service sector is quite large here. Almost anyone can earn 800-1000 INR/month as a chai wallah (tea vender). People can sell things on trains or work for roadside vendors or tailors.

Some schooling is needed to be a secretary or receptionist. They make more like 5000 INR/month. It's next to impossible to move up the ladder without a proper certification, which usually means at least 10<sup>th</sup> standard. If a kid is cognitively able to go to school, s/he must be working toward a 10<sup>th</sup> standard certification, or an equivalent certification, to get services here.

### **Conversation with Dinaz Stafford, Founder and Trustee**

**Dinaz:** We think about nutrition here when we're planning the lunches. When little kids have "highlighted" hair, it means they are malnourished. There are two types of hunger. One is obvious wasting. The other is hidden but makes kids sick. We have a partnership with JJ Hospital to treat sick children. We are considering starting a clinic day.

Kids can come here in the morning and stay throughout the day. We give lunch and snacks. Dinner is only for children in the night shelter. Another NGO, Ratnaniddhi, provides food at a subsidized price.

**GiveWell:** Do you ever have to turn kids away?

**Dinaz:** We never turn kids away. My job is to find kids who need assistance and give them what they need. They aren't motivated to come here.

**GiveWell:** What does Salaam Baalak pay for?

**Dinaz:** I negotiate kids into private schools. We pay for that.

I don't have a record of how much we spend on each child. It's an average of 10,000 INR per child per year.

**GiveWell:** How do you find the kids that come here?

**Dinaz:** We wander along the streets. Kids know us. Kids bring new kids. If a kid has been coming every day I might admit him into school, but if the mother is involved, I'll pull back. We have limited resources.

The average child is involved for about 5 years with regular attendance. For about 50% of the children it's close to 100% attendance; for the others it's more like 60% attendance or less. When a kid has been coming for a week, they get recorded in the books, and if they stop coming I track them down.

**GiveWell:** What would you do with more money?

**Dinaz:** We would increase the number of qualified staff, put more pressure on government, and build a corpus (i.e., endowment) so our funding would be more secure.

There are 27 current pending dropouts. Last year we saw about 200 children the program and 300 leave for a net loss of 100. This happened because we decided to be stricter about criteria for being on the list. This information is in our annual report.

*Dinaz showed us Salaam Baalak's financial records from the most recent year. In brief (in INR):*

- Salaries: 1,213,301
- Legal and professional fees: 89,433
- Advocacy: 111,816
- Education: 445,021
- Nutrition: 729,117
- Medical: 109,649

*We browsed the case files for some of the children served by Salaam Baalak:*

- *Case 1: In 2001, ran away from home; mistreated by mother.*
- *Case 2: Has come to center for 3 years; living in night shelter; in special English classes; unlikely to finish school in Dinaz's opinion due to low intelligence level—she believes she will have a career as a security officer or something similar; is currently failing in school and can't read; Dinaz believed she had likely been raped; came to center willingly and is not feeling very secure; enjoys dancing; is going to be monitored by a volunteer.*
- *Case 3: Report from 2003 states that she entered the program in 1993; her parents were living on a footpath; her mother visits her; her health was normal.*
- *Case 4: Report from 2003 states that she entered the program in 1992; both her parents are dead; her married sister takes care of her.*
- *Case 5: Report from 2008 states that she entered the program in 1997; was referred by World Vision; her mother is HIV positive; her health was normal.*
- *Case 6: Report from 2009 states that she entered the program in 1995; has parents; health was good.*
- *Case 7: Report from 2009 states that she entered the program in 1993; cared for by homeless grandmother; health was good.*

- *Case 8: Report from 2005 states that she entered the program in 1994; was brought in by social workers; her sister left the area but she stayed because she wanted to go to school.*
- *Case 9: Report from 2008 states that she entered the program in 1993; was deserted by parents.*

*Dinaz also showed us a list of drop out or potential drop out cases that she had brought with her that day to discuss with staff members. Below are the reasons given on the sheet for the first 10 cases GiveWell staff read. The sheet also detailed what the children's favorite activities were to do at the center. These included studying, playing, and dancing.*

- *Case 1: Selling flowers instead of coming to shelter*
- *Case 2: no reason given for drop out*
- *Case 3: other children beat him up at the center*
- *Case 4-10: no reason given for drop out*