



Muskaan Support, Australia Inc.

www.MuskaanSupportAustralia.com

MUSKAAN FACT SHEET – Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is Muskaan?**

Muskaan is a non-profit/non-government school in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. The school provides relevant quality educational opportunities to Bhopal's most marginalised urban poor slum communities. Many are scheduled tribes and castes. There is an extremely high government-school drop out rate for children from slum communities with less than 1 in 13 children reaching level 8. Muskaan also works to empower urban poor communities, especially women and children to overcome deprivation and discrimination based on gender, class and identity.

- **Why do the children from slum communities drop out of government schools?**

Children are rebuked and humiliated at school for their class and identity. An irrelevant curriculum does not relate to their life experiences. Rote learning and rigidity in rules and methods is non-engaging and ineffective. Parents are unschooled, scrap-picking commitments and working to support the family's subsistence, all increasing vulnerability to poor health and family violence. Study at home is difficult in the slums and girls are pressured to marry and have family on reaching puberty.

- **How was Muskaan started?**

Social worker Shivani Taneja began working with slum children on the streets in Bhopal in 1998, and explored the reasons they were not at school. She discovered that the government school system was failing these disadvantaged children in many aspects, particularly in lack of meaningful engagement, irrelevant curriculum and the inability to provide a safe and friendly learning space. Muskaan was established as an alternative education model to address these issues and provide opportunities for children trapped in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

- **What programs does Muskaan offer?**

From the initial classes on the kerbside, Muskaan has grown to an integrated set of educational, personal and community health and development programs, targeting 9 of the most highly vulnerable bastis (slum communities) in Bhopal. The programs are delivered in various locations – in rented premises, within the bastis and in one government school building outside regular hours. Across all programs, Muskaan employs 31 full-time and 12 part-time teaching and support staff.

Muskaan's (Direct) Education programs

- ◆ Balwadis – preschools in the bastis to introduce children and parents to early learning processes (7 bastis & 350 children)
- ◆ Muskaan's learning centre – a place for classes and flexible and engaging learning activities (350 children)
- ◆ Classes held in the Bastis - (5 bastis & 180 children)
- ◆ 3 month Education Camps (2 per year) – intensive residential education and personal development programs for children who find it difficult to undertake continuous education attendance (70 children per year)
- ◆ Bal Melas (fairs) – opportunities to share Muskaan's effective principles and practices of teaching with the community and with Government school staff and to learn and celebrate traditional crafts and cultural identity.

Muskaan's Government School Strengthening program

- ◆ Muskaan staff mentoring government school teachers across government schools – discussion & demonstration of the Muskaan model using engaging education principles and practices (100+ government teachers across 25 schools).
- ◆ Muskaan staff providing remedial lessons for underachieving government school children (in 25 schools)
- ◆ Muskaan staff providing library sessions for government schools students and promoting literacy (in 21 schools)
- ◆ Muskaan's programs reach around 2,000 students in government schools.

Community Development programs

- ◆ Women's livelihood and empowerment, Savings and Health programs (4 full-time, 3 part-time staff across 1300 households)

- **Where does the money come from to run Muskaan's programs?**

Grants and donations from different institutional and individual donors help in meeting the recurring costs for the various program activities. Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Asha for Education and the Urban Health Resource Centre have been supporting Muskaan's activities for a long time. You could also support a child's education by annual donations.

- **Does Muskaan receive any funding support from Government?**

Muskaan does not receive funding support from the national or state governments, however the local government has provided space to conduct some activities within a government school.

- **What is the governance structure of the Muskaan organisation and what checks and balances ensure probity?**

The Muskaan organisation comprises a Board of 7 members overseeing all strategic financial, policy and program delivery issues. The Secretary to the Board is the Program Co-ordinator, who works with a management group to ensure program delivery in accordance with policy and budget. Internal and external audits are conducted of Muskaan finances and program outcomes to ensure probity and transparency and to meet the requirements of donors.

Muskaan is a non profit, non governmental organisation, registered under the Societies Registration Act in Madhya Pradesh, India (Reg. No. 6626/98, dated 10/12/1998) and it has permanent registration within the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act of India (Reg. No. 063160102, dated 09/07/2002).

- **What has Muskaan achieved since its formation?**

The success of Muskaan's programs is best seen at an individual level – the development of self identity, self confidence and recognition of achievable opportunities. This may be reflected in the story of the boy who obtains basic literacy levels which enable him to be a driver instead of a labourer, or the story of Jyoti, a young girl who reached level 8 and left to have her family. She now runs a library and reading classes for other mums in her basti. Presently, 6 students are undertaking college degree courses and several others have progressed to vocational training courses. Several adolescents have taken sustainable employment opportunities (2 working at Muskaan) and girls are more empowered to negotiate with their families (for marriage, children, attending college). In 2012, 62 children are appearing for Board examinations.

Since 2008, Muskaan has reached over 1,000 government teachers through annual training programs.

Community programs directly and indirectly reach about 10,000 people, enabling improvement in the overall development level of the bastis, thereby improving the children's lives.

- **What is Muskaan's "vision" ?**

Muskaan's vision is that the urban poor are able to live in dignity and have access to development and opportunity in a just and equitable world. Its mission is to provide a safe space where relevant education opportunities empowers the most marginalised urban poor (children and families) to become agents of change, in their lives and in their communities. Muskaan also aims to strengthen government schools to improve the quality of education and enable positive attitudes towards marginalised children.

- **Next Step – Muskaan's own campus**

Muskaan has been working through rented premises since its inception and needs a permanent home for carrying out the work with a stability and synergy. Donations have enabled purchase of a plot of land at Neelbar on the outskirts of Bhopal, within easy reach of the 9 highly vulnerable slum communities which Muskaan supports. The vision for the next 5 years is to construct a school and hostel facility as a focal point for Muskaan's programs and as a safe place for the development of these children. Planning and design is underway. Following increased retention of children in primary level programs, there will also be a focus on developing broader vocational training options for secondary and post- secondary students.

- **How can we help Muskaan?**

Muskaan Support, Australia Inc. (ABN 81720151754) has been established by a group of enthusiastic Australian supporters to raise funds towards the purchase of land and construction of a school campus and hostel in Bhopal as a base for the delivery of Muskaan education programs to the children of the slum communities in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. 100% of funds provided by Muskaan Support Australia Inc. will be identified in Muskaan accounts and applied to the purchase of land and the construction, equipping and running of the school and hostel. Muskaan welcomes volunteer, financial and in-kind assistance to support the running of its programs and the development of a school campus and hostel.

Visit our website www.MuskaanSupportAustralia.com, visit us on Facebook, contact Marion or Kevin by phone 03 9431 1008, send us an email MuskaanSupportAust@hotmail.com or write to us at P.O. Box 993 Eltham, Victoria 3095 to explore ways in which you might be able to assist.