

Bridge Schooling



Bridge Schools are literally what it says on the tin: for kids who are unable to attend Government schools because they are too remote; or because the Government school is malfunctioning as a result of teacher absenteeism. The kids are given proper attention in the Bridge Schools by Seva Mandir trained teachers. Not only do the kids learn but they learn to self-learn which is one of the greatest gifts as they ultimately move on to Government school. Teacher absenteeism is altogether more palatable if the kid can pick up the book and learn by themselves, or by speaking to other kids around them with confidence.

There are two evident themes to bridge schools. And one not so visible, but essentially profound.

It is very visible how much the kids are enjoying their learning; it is also very visible how seriously they are taking this opportunity. Smiles do not come easily but shining eyes of inner purpose are all about.

The much less visible phenomenon emerged as the kids talk about their lives: the respect given to the kids and their families in the village as the benefits of being able to read and write, and even speak Hindi (not their mother tongue), brought opportunities undreamt of.



At Amaliya Bridge School, almost 100 km from Udaipur, overseas visitors find themselves understanding nothing. *Actually understanding everything.* If they sit among those whose lives were being transformed, they see the caring teacher building both understanding and confidence. They see the kids proud to get up at the front of the class to give their answers, and they see the satisfaction on their face and the face of their friends when they gave the right answer.

And everywhere, the fingerprints of Seva Mandir: the caring, the attention to the kids welfare, the motivation of teachers, the importance put on self-care, the provision of satchels so books could be kept orderly and safe.

Jagdish's father, said that he had not sent his son to school before because the government school was too far away. He did not want his child to walk the route, which meant crossing streams during the monsoon. Like so many kids, the Bridge School is the first formal learning experience for eight year old Jagdish, and he loves it.



The day before he was due to start school, Shankarlal was abducted, put in a jeep full of children heading for work in the cotton fields in Gujarat. Luckily, the police intercepted the jeep before it left Rajasthan. Eight year old Shankarlal was returned to his parents, and he is now attending school and performing well.



Over one hundred bridge school graduates, now in the 6th form or university, came together to share their educational journey. Were it not for Seva Mandir, these teenagers would never have imagined that they would have made it this far.



They were able to envisage a career. They see a life where learning truly gives options. Role models in their community, this is the elixir of sustainability.