



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Buddha Education Foundation

Faiths/Traditions Represented: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and Jain.

Location of CC: Maitreya Buddha Vihar, H-2/48. Sector -16. Rohini Delhi-110089 (India)

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Key Areas of Focus: Impart moral education to young. Work for social justice and environment.

Summary:

Buddha Education Foundation was started in 2009 by Mr. NC Baudh, when he took up voluntary retirement from his regular job in 1993 and became known as Bikkhu Vishwa Bandhu. He imagined a small organization that provides informal moral education on universal principles to young children from all communities during holidays and vacations through volunteer teachers. Today, Buddha Education Foundation has 135 centers in four states and 5420 enrolled students in rural Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. Buddha Education Foundation's programs primarily focus on providing free education and study material for students.



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1. *What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?*

There were ten (5 Hindu, 2 Jain, and 3 Sikh) different religious places of worship in the area our CC is located, the only faith present in the community but not represented with a structure, was Buddhism. We wanted to open a Buddhist shrine with the objective of helping inculcate children with moral values education rooted in Buddhist insights of universal responsibility. A diverse metropolitan environment necessitates us to be tolerant. We established an informal school that grew and spread to other states. This school runs on weekends and holidays.

2. *Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?*

Our CC began with a small school in its own residential building. Our school provides moral education to young boys and girls from different beliefs and traditions. This was previously nonexistent in the neighborhood.

3. *Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?*

Our main objective is to impart moral education, hold examinations, and confer certificates of completion of courses. Our other activity involves working to benefit women from marginalized sections of our society. On the International Day of Women, we organized an awareness generation campaign on women's empowerment at Shahpur Dairy, an economically disadvantaged area. Women of different age and religious affiliations participated in our program. Seeing males voluntarily attend and participate in the program was very encouraging; it was first time in their life they heard about women's empowerment. Many resolved to continue working for the cause.

4. *Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?*

We work and share our experiences with all religious groups in our community. We mutually celebrate and join celebrations and ceremonies at our convenience.

5. *Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.*

The simple act of taking initiative is enough. We have invited reputed members of other belief traditions to participate in our Buddhajayanti celebration as speakers. It worked well. Now they too invite us to their social gatherings. Moreover, our Moral Education School children act as ambassadors for bridge-building in their respective communities.



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6. *Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)?*

Our ultimate hope is to have a society living in perfect harmony. We intend to achieve this by training young minds with moral values of universal responsibility as the Dalai Lama stresses.

7. *How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?*

We witness improvement whenever our mutual cooperation and respect is appreciated by members of other religious beliefs. When they respectfully invite us to their family and social gathering, then we presume our cooperation is improving.

8. *How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict? (NOTE: This question is relevant only in areas with violence/open conflict.)*

At present, we do not have any such open conflicts. This is a locality where people of different social and economic strata from different parts of India have migrated and settled.

9. *What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people?*

As stated earlier, frequent interactions, growing mutual cooperation and the increasing number of students in our CC's Moral Education School make us feel that relations amongst other people is improving significantly.

10. *Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.*

When our CC first organized a Women's Day program with economically disadvantaged communities in Shahpur, we had 245 women of different ages and religious affiliations taking part. The women in attendance were mostly illiterate housewives whose husbands factory workers, street hawkers, and rickshaw pullers. They were unaware of their rights and privileges, and hesitated in sharing their pain and suffering in public. At such an event a 21 year old Hindu woman named Poonam Kalam came with her two little babies, stood up and boldly said, "I will speak. We women live like animals. We women work the whole day and at night get beaten by husbands who are drunkards or drug addicts. I was hesitant to share this before because no one until today has asked us to speak." Her education and interfaith experience with us made her bold and vocal. This was just the beginning. Soon after, everyone wanted to speak and had the opportunity to share their problems. It was a bonding experience for women from different faith traditions to realize the similarities in their situations.



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11. How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?

The young mind is trained here on how to live in peace and harmony in a society with different cultures, ethnic diversity, and linguistic multiplicity. Our grassroots effort teaches students how to resolve their own differences and befriend all.

12. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are challenges?

In our CC, a large number of members belong to the Buddhist tradition but they listen to others with respect. We have two Jain, four Muslim and six Hindu families as URI members in addition to our majority Buddhist members. They are also respected member of their communities and know one another well.

13. How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?

Being a part of URI, allows our work to be globalized. We receive regular guidance from the regional team on how to incorporate URI's PPPs into our organizational objectives. Their encouragement and leadership help us achieve our goals.

14. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?

As stated above, the URI regional team helps us by making our efforts more realistic and all inclusive. We would like standard skill enhancements and sustainable resource generation trainings from URI.