



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Mahila Chetna Kendra

Faiths/Traditions Represented: Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain

Location of CC: Chhatrapur, Mehrauli, Delhi, India

Key Areas of Focus: Women Awareness and Empowerment

Summary

Mahila Chetna Kendra CC is located in Dera village outside of New Delhi, India. They work with women from Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Jain communities, primarily bringing them together for economic empowerment and vocational training programs. The Hindu and Muslim Gujjar communities are prone to misunderstandings and violence. By providing interfaith spaces to learn and work together, Mahila Chetna Kendra is advancing prospects for women and helping them forge strong relationships with peers from diverse backgrounds.

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

Our CC is working in a cluster of 41 villages in Delhi in a dominant Hindu and Muslim Gujjar community where literacy and health conditions for women are poor. Mainly they engage in occupations like buffalo rearing, automobile/taxi driving and also making earthen pots.

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

Besides Hindu and Muslim Gujjar, other religious communities live together. Nevertheless, occasional communal tension is not uncommon. Moreover, women and particularly girl child education and healthcare are marginal.

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

“Promoting Peace and Non-violence” through women awareness and empowerment is the key area of activities of the Mahila Chetna CC. By providing six months training in



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basic computer applications it empowers for self-employment. A batch of 120 women of 12-35 age group get training in skills of developing low cost nutritious food and distribution. They are also trained in beautician and tailoring, and open their own shops.

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

Our CC is working with women and girl-child of both Hindu and Muslim Gujar community since 1973. We also bring together minority communities of Sikh and Jain through public meetings and festive celebrations.

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?

Our CC organizes camps on health and hygiene in which women of the area irrespective of religious affiliation take active part. "Clean kitchen, clean toilet, and cheap Nutritious Food for Family" remains the motto of the campaign. Community dining during religious festivals and marriage ceremonies are other occasions to mark interfaith celebrations. It is more on action than speech.

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

Main objective of our CC is to bring qualitative change in the life of the women. We believe if a woman is educated and financially empowered she becomes an effective agent of family transformation and acquires say in decision making process in the family. We wish to train, educate and empower those women who do not have the opportunity to go to school and remain merely confined to household activities due to the conservative outlook from male members of the family.

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

We have witnessed while interacting with girls in computer classes that they not only belong to different religions but also different social and family backgrounds, and the classes provide a place for rare interaction. Informal education training in making nutritional food, making quality pickles and door to door distribution allows them to have interaction with different traditional families. Since they go in small groups in a known area they feel safe and protected.



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8. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?

Attendance of girls from different religions, staff and teaching faculty consist of different social and religious tradition working together. Restrictions on girls is lessening.

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

Many girls from this center have gone for higher studies and opt teaching as career. On Teacher's Day the September 5th, the Delhi Government's award for the best teacher of the year 2013, was awarded to Ms. Sushma who has been the product of this school. She is teaching in government school Nazzafgarh, Delhi.

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

It is a women centric organization of middle level infrastructure with a very limited resources working at the grass root level. Women and girls of different age groups from different faith traditions get training in skill-development. They work and dine together, and personal bonds are forged. Working together for the cause of their own empowerment and community engagement can be seen as being in close harmony with URI mission.