



Shashank Vodapally  
Youth Volunteer, DCI  
Cheshire, CT

Mr. Naresh Chaudhary, CEO of the SMILE foundation, along with Shashank Vodapally, Youth Volunteer representative from DCI take a picture to commemorate the first communication between the two organizations.

My name is Shashank Vodapally, and I'm a junior at Cheshire High School. Like many other kids I volunteered over the summer to gain more community service hours, which I hoped would perhaps help me in the future after High School. I decided to join a organization called DCI.

DCI, which stands for Distressed Children and Infants International, is an international organization that's working to stop child labor, and promote education and healthcare for children along with their families. After coming across this organization through word of mouth, I decided to go visit their head office which was in Cheshire, making it incredibly convenient for me.

During my first visit the executive director of the organization, Dr. Hoque, showed me how DCI was working to impact the lives of children and how they hoped to spread out there help globally. After seeing this I was amazed at what DCI was able to achieve; they were helping children in Bangladesh make a life for themselves, and this was initiated by one person, Dr. Hoque. As I was leaving DCI office my mind was astounded at how much of a difference he was making, and at that moment my entire premise for volunteering changed. Instead of worrying about how many hours I would be able to gain from volunteering at DCI, I wanted to know that I was helping to make a difference in someone else's life. And so I began to volunteer at their main office in helping in any way I could, knowing that it would in turn help the program along with the lives of others.

Even though I was volunteering at DCI, I knew that there was much more that I could do, and so after seeking approval from Dr. Hoque I began searching for various nonprofit organizations in India which had very similar goal to DCI, and could perhaps help DCI impact the lives of Indian Children as well. After searching on the internet for several days I came across multiple organizations which I thought would be able to collaborate with DCI to help provide relief, and so I sent email's to these organizations in hope of a response.

In a matter of one to two days my first response came from the SMILE Foundation in India. They were a well established organization that seemed to have all the same goals as DCI and so I really hoped that collaboration between the two organizations would be possible. After another week or two of emails between the SMILE Foundation and me, we were finally able to set up a meeting date, and in fact it fit perfectly within the time span of my family's trip to India.

After two or three days of arriving in India I met with Mr. Naresh Chaudhary, CEO of SMILE, and Mr. Prasanna Kumar who explained to me all the programs and projects that SMILE was working on to help improve the lives of children all over India. They informed me that the SMILE Foundation was reaching out to over 1 million children all over India, and on hearing this I was astounded. After our

discussion Mr. Prasanna Kumar offered to take me to visit one of their facilities later that week so I agreed.

Hoping to see just how SMILE was impacting the lives of children, I was heart struck at how much hope they were bringing into the lives of so many little children. At the one school we visited they had taken working children off the streets and provided them with not only a new home, and education, but also with a new path which if they traveled would lead to a life of happiness. Just imagining what would have happened to these children if they hadn't been taken off the street conjures up devastating images in my mind because some of them may have not have been able to survive on their own much longer. These children that were being taken off the street were very young at oldest maybe 10 or 11 years old, but the truth is that there are millions of other children who continue to work either to help support their families, or simply to support themselves.

My hope in meeting with Mr. Chaudhary and Mr. Kumar was to create an opportunity for DCI to help with the SMILE Foundation's programs in India. Since I returned to the US I have been working on acting as the collaborator between the two organizations, and I hope that in the future DCI, along with the SMILE Foundation will be able to help improve the lives of many children, not only in India, but all around the world.

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