

A Journey Through Kachra Kundi With THAAKAT

Karachi, Pakistan



My journey began at 7 am from metro Karachi, it was about an hour ride to the village. I had seen poverty everywhere in the city but it had not prepared me for what I was about to experience. I was on my way to 'kachra kundi' which translates to 'dumping ground'. We had committed to launching a school at this site and despite all of the things we had heard about the fact that a school in a place like this would have zero impact, I believed that was false. Every child has a dream to go to school and to become something. Every child in this neighborhood dreamt about escaping.

As our car approached the dirt tracks, rubble and garbage- the dark and polluted air seeped through the windows. I felt myself trying to catch a breath. The smoke cleared to reveal little shadows creeping up from behind the mounds of litter.



Every face told a story. The broken smiles and rusted hands showed the efforts of their hard work. One day of picking garbage brought them maybe a few pennies a day, if they were lucky. There was no such thing as morning breakfast, showers were unheard of. Any basic facility we take for granted here today, did not exist. These people lived in a bubble, tied to this dumping ground through their misfortunes.



As we wandered carefully over the burning garbage we came to their shacks. These were their homes. These homes were built with anything they could find in the dumping ground. Cardboard, old blankets, cans and wrappers. Occasionally we saw an old 80's TV set, didn't work, but kept there as a proud decoration.

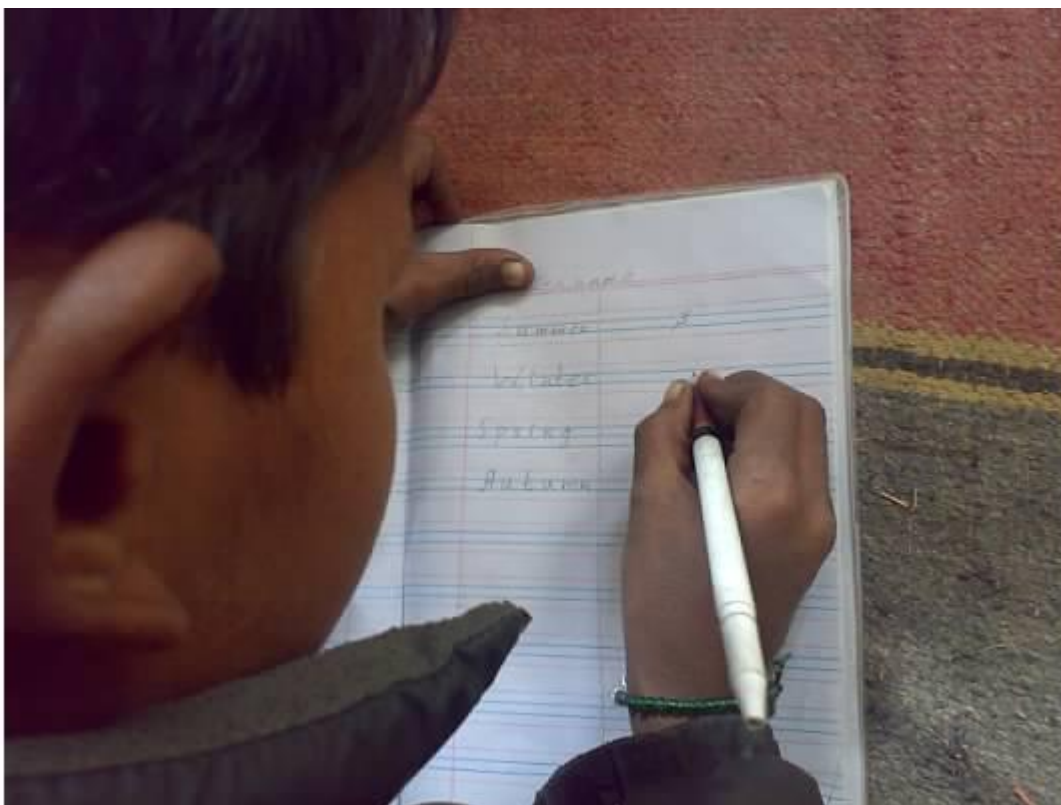


Often I ran into kids who were small and mighty but looked as if they were forced to grow up too fast. A young boy ready to start his day at work wore an upside down smile. His tiny hands- dirty, brittle and bruised from picking in the burning garbage. His voice was coarse from working in the heat and breathing in the toxic air.

To keep the hundreds of flies at bay, he grabbed his mother's last pot of water and splashed his face. Our volunteer doctor on site shared that when we first set up camp to build a school here he started treating children. Many of these children had flies embedded in their open wounds. There were so many things he shared that made my heart heavy.



I wanted to get a good look at the village, so we climbed the rocky hills and turned around. The mass of smoke burning from the litter made the surroundings look ghastly. There was no greenery, no excitement. There was no color, no air, just a staleness around us. You'll see two buildings, those are the small classrooms that existed before we finished building our campus at the entrance of the village. Beyond that, was a world unknown. Beyond that lived hundreds of people who didn't exist to the rest of the world.



The experience was unreal. In this pocket of sadness I did see hope. I walked into a classroom and saw a young boy writing the seasons of the year in English. Here we had a community that had no access to any civic facilities and here in this same community there was a young boy excitedly writing the answers to his exam. He had an opportunity to change his future.



We started fundraising that same year and through the support of our kind donors were able to build 9 classrooms from the ground up to serve these villagers and the tens of thousands in surrounding areas. A lifetime partnership was formed with Idara Al Khair, the organization teaching these students and managing the school. This same trip I visited their other school site, echoing were the voices of more than 2200 children. When I saw the quality and passion of their work I knew that this was the project for us.

With 250 children in attendance the first year at our campus, we pounded forward, we had to support this site for life. I never wanted to give up. Thaakat is currently the sole financial supporter of this growing school.



Along the way there have been challenges. Many parents have been reluctant, saying that they depend on the salary of the whole family. Many parents have not allowed their daughters to attend school as they felt it wasn't necessary for a girl to learn or that it made her a 'bad' child.

It is a girl's right to be able to receive an education. In fact, a girl who receives an education will pass it onto her family and community, she will be able to demand respect from others. A girl who is educated will help us in our fight to conquer global problems.

Our principal, Mazahir Sahib, arrives to the school site at 5 am every day ready to tackle these problems. Through individual interventions and meetings with the family, we have been able to boast a 40% attendance rate of female students. Read what one of our inspiring girls says about her journey [here](#).

"Then I made the decision that no matter what happens, I will get an education. I will get an education so that I can help my community and my country and so that I can help other girls who are kept from receiving an education. I want these girls to know what education means and why it is so important. Together we can help bring progress to our country."

-Shaheen



In 2013 we have almost 400 students in attendance filling 16 classrooms. Our students range in age from as little as 4 years old through 16 years old. All backgrounds and ages are welcome.

We have struggled to raise enough to cover the salary of our teachers, many of whom cannot stay without pay. The rugs in the classroom are heavy and dusty with dirt, the children have no shoes- many of whom walk from more than 8 kilometers away. It costs us \$2600 to maintain just teacher salaries and provide one meal a day for all of these kids. Our hope is strong because we know how excited these children are for the opportunity, but our hearts are heavy as we wonder if we will be able to keep our promise to support them in their every day.