



# Education Scholarships for Child Laborers in India

## Introducing LEARN

As quoted in the May 21, 2009 edition of *The Economist*:



*“India is a land of bright promise. It is also extremely poor. About 27m Indians will be born this year. Unless things improve, almost 2m of them will die before the next general election. Of the children who survive, more than 40% will be physically stunted by malnutrition. Most will enroll in a school, but they cannot count on their teachers showing up. After five years of classes, less than 60% will be able to read a short story and more than 60% will still be stumped by simple arithmetic.”*

With these facts in mind, Lotus Outreach developed the Lotus Education As a Right Network (LEARN) to enroll school-aged children who are currently left out of the education system and to bring substandard schools up to par through right to education advocacy. The LEARN program utilizes a combination of legal advocacy, community mobilization and independent monitoring to ensure the quality of government schools in rural Haryana. By focusing on improving—rather than replicating—existing educational infrastructures, Lotus Outreach is able to ensure access to quality education for thousands of children while operating on a shoestring budget.

## Child Labor in India

As a nation, India has the highest number of child laborers in the world. A 2001 census counted 12.6 million working children, while other estimates place the number as high as 115 million. Tellingly, over 85 percent of these working children come from rural areas, such as Mewat, Haryana—our target district for the LEARN advocacy program.

In the course of our right to education advocacy in Mewat, it came to our attention that hundreds of out-of-state children were laboring in the district’s 30 brick kilns. As landless

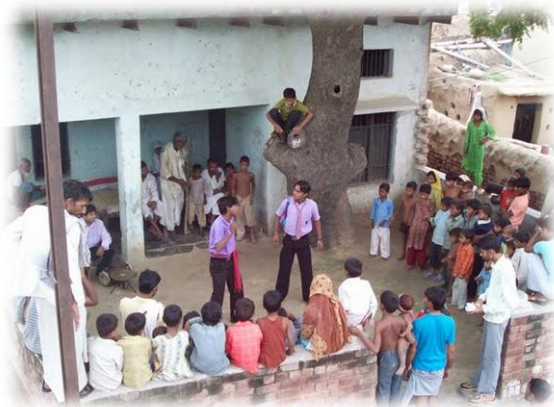
migrants, their families travel hundreds of miles from neighboring states such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar so they can secure livelihoods for themselves and care for aging and ailing family members back home. Though they represent the lowest socio-economic castes, they are excluded from local government incentives for the poor as a result of their migrant status. Such incentives include the provision of school materials and supplies for



impoverished children as well as the waiving of annual school fees. Without access to these seemingly minor education incentives, migrant laboring families are unable to afford the costs of enrolling their children in school. Compounding the problem is their fear of being discriminated against by local school officials and residents by virtue of their different religion and caste. Ultimately, as a result of cultural and economic barriers, these children end up working 14-16 hour days alongside their parents in dangerous conditions.

## Our Solution

In Spring 2009, Lotus Outreach organized community meetings with workers at five of Mewat's 30 brick kilns in order to better understand the dynamics that keep these children working at the expense of attending school. The results of our informal surveys were astounding: *all* of the parents wanted to see their children get an education and escape the shackles of poverty that have plagued their families for generations. Yet none of them (a) could afford the costs associated with enrolling children in school and (b) felt comfortable—as migrants from a different socio-economic caste—sending their children to



local schools for fear of discrimination.

Consequently, the parents opted to have their children labor alongside them—for days often exceeding 18 hours—molding and firing bricks.

Our solution to these barriers is simple: by collaborating with local education authorities and school headmasters, we have ensured seats will be provided to all of these children regardless of their residency status, religion or caste. Our goal now is to assuage the migrant community's fears of discrimination, educate them on the importance of education as a

catalyst for human development, and assure them that their children will receive quality education once they enroll. Lastly, we will close the final barrier to these children's education by providing a \$20 scholarship package for each child. These scholarship packages or enrollment kits will include two school uniforms, one book bag, writing utensils, notebooks, a pair of shoes and will cover the \$1 annual enrollment fee.

## ***We need your help.***

Fortunately, the LEARN program already has the staff and infrastructure required to hold community education sessions within the brick factories, distribute the scholarship packages and monitor the ongoing progress of the children. But we lack financial support for the actual scholarship materials. This is where you come in: for only \$20, we can provide a complete enrollment kit to one child. Will you help us get these children out of hazardous brick factories and into school?



## **Program Implementation and Timeline**

The project will begin in September 2009, as the migrant communities return to work following the monsoon season and in time for the new school year. We will visit each of the 30 brick kilns, hold community education sessions, and inform the parents of the scholarship provisions available to their children. Our goal will be to enroll as many laboring children as our finances allow by the end of November, so they can study for at least 4 months prior the annual grade promotions in March 2010.

The continued attendance and academic progress of the children will be monitored on a quarterly basis at minimum through visits to the brick kilns, community sessions, and meetings with school teachers and headmasters.

To date, Lotus Outreach has provided 12 migrant children with such scholarships. They are attending class regularly.

## **Case Study: Manoj and Kapil**



*My name is Kusum Devi and I am 45 years old. I live with my husband, our two children and 15 other families that migrated from our village in Uttar Pradesh to work in a brick factory in Mewat, Haryana. In our home village of Hathras, we do not own land and regular work is unavailable. This forces us to come to Mewat for about nine months a year for work. We go back to our village from June to September, as the brick factories must close during the monsoon season.*

*Our family works 14-hour days at the brick factory. Together, the four of us make about 1,500 bricks and earn \$6 each day. We begin working at 11:00 PM, as we cannot work during the day due to the scorching heat. After working until about 9:00 AM, we get a break for food and*

*sleep. We then go back to the factory at 4:00 in the afternoon and work until 8:00 in the evening. Our children, Kapil (age 6) and Manoj (age 10) work at the factory too because our family needs the money. We are also afraid to send our children to school because the people of Mewat don't like migrants and they often harass us. One day some people came from White Lotus [Lotus Outreach's sister office in Delhi] and asked us to send the children to school. They organized a meeting and talked to all the people in the factory. The factory workers agreed as White Lotus assured us that our children would be safe and better off in school. They were quite generous and gave school bags and uniforms to our children. Moreover, they took our children to the school to actually enroll them.*

*We were surprised at the cooperative behavior of the teachers. We were always interested in the education of our children but were scared due to our migrant status. Though we will go back to our home town in a few days, we have decided that we will come back to this very village after the monsoon season so that our children can continue going to the same school, which seems to be good. The teachers at the school have assured us that our children will be welcomed back after the break.*

*As landless migrant laborers, our lives are hopeless but we are very happy that our children will be educated now and we hope that they will not have to run around the country to find work when they grow up. Hopefully when they get older they can settle down somewhere with good jobs and enjoy the respect and dignity that comes with education. Our children not only get to go to school, but they get meals there too. They love school very much and keep asking us "why can't we go to school on Sunday!?"*

## **Contact Us**

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