

Literacy rises in Malhee as children line up to enroll

Smiling children playfully walk with their classmates every morning to Temporary Learning Centers in the village of Malhee. The echo of the students while they read their lessons aloud can be heard from a good distance. For approximately 150 students this is their first experience at formal education, something which was inconceivable for them not very long ago. The nearest was a 3 km walk to a rundown government school in Gul Burriri, and the ones committed enough to make the journey every day were greeted by absent teachers and empty classrooms. *"I used to send my two sons to school at Gul Burriri but the teacher there wouldn't ever come. I even had to make them stay at my sister's house sometimes since the school there was nearer to her house,"* he says. He has recently enrolled his two sons at one of OSDI's TLCs.



Proximity was also a major impediment especially for the girls of Malhee village since conservative attitudes limit the women from venturing far. It has made a world of a difference for many girls that have been enrolled in the TLC. *"I was so happy to find out that there was a school in my village otherwise I wouldn't have been able to go to one,"* smiles Nusrat, a female student of the TLC.

Children are seated on mats everyday while they are given lessons in essential subjects such as Mathematics, Sindhi, Quranic instructions, Urdu and English. Lessons are 2 to 3 hours long delivered daily by an OSDI appointed teacher. *"The teacher here remembers us by our names and pays us individual attention too,"* says Imtiaz, a student of class 2.

Costs are also a major deterrent for many households who want to send their children to schools. Malhee is a community mainly of farmers and livestock grazers living on modest means. Traditionally provision of food, shelter and clothes take precedence over education. Taking the financial constraints into consideration, OSDI has kept its TLCs of Mumtaz Soomro and Hazar Khan Burriri in Malhee affordable with uniforms, curriculum and shoes provided to the students as well. The local Education District Officer has also provided textbooks to students in praise of the TLC's efforts.

Skills acquired in the TLCs are making a huge difference in the lives of the TLC students: *"I help my father in calculating the value of his crop harvest and the amount he owes to the local wadera,"* boasts a proud student. Even matters of health and hygiene have improved for some of the students because of the emphasis on health and hygiene education to the students. As Saad, a student attests *"we used to get sick a lot especially in the winter time. Now we are more aware of our health. My sister and I both wash our hands before every meal."*

There is no greater endorsement from the community than the steady rise in the number of students in the TLCs which stand currently at around 150 from an original 30. Primary literacy provides aspiration and opportunity to the children in the TLCs for the first time. The sense of a better future is reflected in these children's aspirations when they are asked on what they want to be when they grow up. Zakira Hussain wants to be a soldier, while Sanaullah Solangi wants to become an engineer, and Imitiaz wants to be a pilot. If recent progress of the TLC is anything to go by, they might have a chance to realize this dream one day.