

It was final exam day and Sandya was completing her assignment of applying makeup, adornment, and hair styling for Arti, a fellow student in PCI's beauty class at the New Seemapuri Vocational Training Center in eastern Delhi. As PCI India's new Country Director, I was visiting the Vocational Training Center for the first time and entered the classroom where about a dozen young women were participating in the beauty class. After Sandya completed her work, Arti looked as beautiful as the Bollywood actresses adorning the walls of the classroom. I'm not sure how the teacher graded her, but in my book Arti deserved an A plus!



The beauty class is one of four types of classes that PCI offers young women from 14- 25 in the surrounding community. Other classes include sewing, computer skills, and painting. Each of these four classes are offered during four shifts of two hours each. Thus, 16 courses a day are provided that together train about 150- 200 young women each day, and about 700 per year. On alternate Saturdays, the girls gather for recreational activities like playing board games and cultural dance.

New Seemapuri is near eastern Delhi's largest garbage dump and just a few blocks from the Vocational Training Center is a several square block area of recyclable sorting, or "rag picking" as it is referred to here. Actually, much more than rags are sorted; plastics, glass, paper, metal, and rubber are all sorted and then bundled up for transport to recycling factories. I walked through the rag picking area and saw three women sorting through the garbage. They said they work an 11 hour shift and get paid the equivalent of \$2.40 a day. Many of the girls and young women at the Vocational Training Center also work as rag pickers. In fact, the Center is located where it is in order to be conveniently located to this area where so many girls and young women work.

Though many of the students at the Vocational Training Center continue to sort recyclable material, many others have gone on to get better jobs as a result of the vocational training they've received from PCI. In fact, some former students in the beauty class have found employment in beauty salons and in the wedding industry, where elaborate preparations are made to prepare the bride for the wedding ceremony, including makeup, hair styling and traditional henna paintings. The director of the Center estimates that about half of the Vocational Training Center's graduates have gone on from rag picking, or other menial jobs, to better paying jobs in the workplace or at home. The New Seemapuri Vocational Training Center has been operating since 2002 and is one component of PCI's Orphans and Vulnerable Children Legacy Project, supported in part by the Tarsadia Foundation, individual donations, and through the help of many volunteers.



Students in beauty class at PCI's Vocational Training Center