**Project goals:**

To provide vocational training of sewing and embroidery to 20 deaf women at the Deaf Reach Center in Karachi, Pakistan to provide infrastructure and materials to the center to provide a sustainable project that can be continued for the years to come. The training would enable the women to be equipped with skills that they could use to produce clothes for Pakistan’s growing clothing industry and thus be financially stable.

**Other sources of financial funding:**

MiddStart

**Project updates and details**

The first phase of the project was to arrive in Karachi and meet with all the people on the ground who I had been communicating with via email for the past 5 months. I met up with the Deaf Reach Center’s coordinator and we began to plan the entire project with the exact dates and revise the budget. We had to keep in considering cultural holidays like those for Eid and adjust timings for Ramadan. The planning was essential as it allowed us to lay out exact quantities of everything. We went over the supply list of each and every thing that would be required for training all the way from sewing machines to small threads needed for embroidery and the different types of needles. I also met up with the trainers, Perveen and Asif, for sewing and embroidery respectively. We talked at length about the training procedures, and the supplies required. I also planned out the transport, food and other logistics during this period.

The second phase of the project was shopping for supplies. This was probably the most challenging part of the project. It required going to the busy, crowded, dangerous malls of
Karachi and shopping for all the supplies needed for the sewing and embroidery training. This phase allowed me to connect with the local people. The shopkeepers were all genuinely helpful and I had a very pleasant experience with people in the malls and on the street. However, it was still challenging for two women to go to dangerous areas of the city everyday while targeted killings were going on and threats of bombs were present. I learnt the skill of bargaining and pleasing with words to get a good price for the supplies that we were buying. I learn a lot from the trainer Perveen as she bargained with shopkeepers with confidence and it allowed me to witness the strength and bravery of Pakistani women and I felt inspired by it. We shopped for each and every thing from a variety of shops to get the best possible material for a sustainable training project.

The third phase was the actual training sessions. They ran from 8 am till 4 pm every day except Sunday. The daily schedule looked like this: at 8 am the van would come to pick me up. We would then go to pick each trainee from their house. This would take one hour. We would pass through the most dangerous and no-entry zone areas of Karachi that not many people would go to. It was very interesting to see areas of my hometown that I had never thought I would see in my life and the difference in lifestyle there. At 9 am we would reach the center and training would begin. We would set everything up, the ‘addas’ that are used for embroidery would be laid out, all the supplies would be taken out from the cupboard, and the trainers would begin working with the women teaching them how to do various stitches on cloth and embroider them. Several stitches were taught to them: basket stitch, mirror work, shade work, fern stitch, whipped back stitch, thread back stitch etc. Part of the budget was spent on making manuals for future use: we recorded every detail of the training (e.g how to do a thread back stitch, the materials required, step by step procedure and pictures of the final product) in manuals. This allowed the project to
be sustainable as it was all stored for future use. Moreover, even while stitching and embroidery, the deaf women were asked to write down everything on their own notebooks so that they could remember all the techniques. I wrote down all the procedures on the white board and they would all copy it from there. Work would go on from 9 am – 11 am. From 11 to 11:30 we would have our tea break, during which we would drink tea and eat snacks. Then training would go on from 11:30 – 2:00, at 2 we would eat lunch, scrumptious Pakistani food. I ate with the women and we had lots of fun in sign language together. From 2:30 – 4 training would resume. By the end we would all be quite tired but would be feeling great. I got extremely close to the people I was working with and it was extremely hard to say goodbye without 2 whole hours of crying. The project included the making of bed covers, shalwar kameezes, pillow cases, embroidery on various pouches etc.

Some of the challenges that I faced were that of security. Karachi is a dangerous city, and our van was held up at gunpoint in the morning. The gunmen asked for cell phones, money and laptops even from the deaf women. Moreover, the office where we were doing our planning burnt down and most things got destroyed. It was generally unsafe to do anything after sunset, or even before that it required a lot of safety and precaution to shop for supplies or do anything on the roads. The lack of electricity, water and basic supplies also added to the challenges faced.

Another challenge I faced in the beginning was that I was treated like an outsider. Since everyone knew I was studying in the USA and my Urdu was not so good, especially the accent as I had gone back after some years, they were not treating me as their own but as someone who had come from far away; a foreigner. It also had to do with the age; most of the people I was working with were far older than me. However, I was able to overcome these challenges by perfecting my Urdu and listening to local news channels to get my accent right. Moreover, I
dressed in the local loose ‘shalwar kameez’ dress that soon allowed me to integrate well with the people I was working with and remove the differences of age.

The last challenge was that of health. Lack of clean water and bacteria present in almost everything caused me to be sick for a week with high fever. This was a low point in the project, but with the help of medicines and rest, I was able to regain strength, persevere and continue with the project.

This summer grant allowed me to reconnect with my roots, my homeland, my people in a way I could never have done when I was living in Karachi. It allowed me to explore dangerous areas, gain new insight into the dynamics of the life of Karachi and gain confidence, leadership skills and most of all courage. I learnt to go out and do things, to dream big and to face challenges as they come. It allowed me to persevere and always keep thinking positively.

I am so grateful to MCSE for giving me the opportunity to reconnect with my past and provide relief to deaf women in Karachi, Pakistan. I was completely transformed this summer, transformed by the love I received, the joy, happiness, inspiration and courage. I am truly energized for the year because of this remarkable experience, and I will always cherish the memories of those 2 months in my heart.