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Bi-laterals at Chintan

Every year in by May, the team at Chintan undertakes an additional responsibility: guiding volunteers. By January, we begin receiving over a hundred emails from young people, asking if they can lend a hand during their summer break. This means working in the kind of physical sites that they usually have never encountered before—a wastepicker run material recovery center at the New Delhi Railway Station, a landfill school to help former children wastepickers stay in insipid Municipal schools, a doorstep waste collection locality where none of the residents segregate waste.

Why do we do this? In part, we want to make people aware of the world of recycling, and the challenges an average recycler faces. We also do this to help young people believe in taking action to make change. We also feel vindicated when a volunteer is able to feel less scared of the poor.

The wastepickers we work with rate public respect next to only stable livelihoods, on their wish-list. Their encounters with the middle class are mostly hair-raising, occasionally heart-warming. We need those who stand up for the workers, something a young person who can make sense of recyclers, is able to do well.

The heart of the matter, for us, every summer, lies in building bridges.