



Asha for Education
Central New Jersey

Dear Friend,

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to Asha for Education, a non-profit organization devoted to catalyzing socio-economic change in India through the education of underprivileged children. This brochure contains information about Asha for Education as an organization, as well as Asha's Central New Jersey Chapter. We have included information about our history, achievements, goals and projects.

Please take a few minutes to go through this brochure and learn about Asha. We welcome your questions or comments at **centralnj@ashanet.org**.

Thank you for your interest in our organization and we hope you will join us in our effort to build a better future for the underprivileged children in India.

Sincerely,

The Volunteers at Asha-CNJ

Asha for Education – Central New Jersey
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Who We Are

We are a diverse group of volunteers who believe in Asha's mission to promote basic education for underprivileged children in India.

We are students – high school, undergraduate and graduate.

We work in corporations, large and small and in public and private institutions. Some of us are self-employed, and some of us work part-time. We are also homemakers or retirees who think of volunteerism as our profession.

We are from India. Some of us were born in India and others in the U.S.A or elsewhere.

We are also Americans who care about India. Some of us have been in the U.S.A for many years; others for just a short time.

Our pasts and presents are spread across India, U.S.A and other countries. Our futures may take us back to India, keep us in the U.S.A or send us somewhere else in the world.

What brings us together is India's future and the hope that by volunteering with Asha, we will, to some or any measure, improve the future for the millions of under privileged children in India by giving them, at the very least - a chance for an education.

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What is Asha for Education?

Asha for Education is a secular organization dedicated to change in India by focusing on basic education in the belief that education is a critical requisite for socio-economic change. In keeping with this focus, our volunteers are involved with and support projects that are secular and have an education related component to them.

The objectives of our organization are:

1. To provide education to underprivileged children in India.
2. To encourage the formation of local chapters across the world to reach out to larger sections of the population.
3. To support and cooperate with persons and groups already engaged in similar activities.
4. To raise the required human and other resources to achieve the group objectives.
5. To provide opportunities to individuals living outside India who wish to participate in Asha activities in India.
6. To address, wherever possible, other life affecting issues such as health care, the environment, socioeconomic aspects and women's issues.

Today, there are nearly 70 Asha chapters worldwide: 45 in the US, 14 in India, and 7 in Europe, Singapore and Australia. The organization has more than a 1000 active volunteers and several thousand supporters around the world. To date, Asha has supported more than 385 different projects spanning 24 states in India. Almost \$4,000,000 has been disbursed to these projects since Asha's inception in 1991. In 2002 alone, Asha chapters raised and disbursed more than \$1,000,000 to over 200 projects. The annual reports and our financial statements are available on the Asha for Education webpage (www.ashanet.org).

Perhaps, more important than these numbers is the personal leadership that the volunteers take in carrying out Asha's activities. Involvement with Asha has produced awareness about developmental issues in India and has inspired a whole range of volunteers to get involved in other social causes. There is an increased emphasis on the formation of more chapters in India (called Asha Centers), to draw upon the collective energy and experience of part and fulltime volunteers in India and to build closer bonds with our projects. These Asha Centers serve to network likeminded individuals, in addition to pioneering bold new initiatives in the field of education. Thus, Asha, while making a difference in the lives of underprivileged children of India, is also preparing a group of people who are more socially aware and socially responsible in their lives.

To learn more about Asha, please visit:

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A Brief History of Asha for Education

In the summer of 1991, a few students including V.J.P.Srivatsavoy, Deepak Gupta, and Sandeep Pandey got together to think of ways in which they could play a role in the development of India, the country of their origin. These young people shared the belief that education is a critical requisite and an effective catalyst for social and economic change in India. Basic education became the agenda for the action group that emerged from this gathering. The group was named Asha to represent the *hope* that had brought these individuals together and the hope that they aimed to bring into the lives of children in India. In that summer of 1991, Asha was born at the University of California in Berkeley.

"The Beginnings" by V.J.P.Srivatsavoy

It all started in April 1991. I was trying to organize a discussion group on educational issues. My initial idea was to start a non-profit research group of students who would be returning to India. The group would focus on the issues of education and appropriate technology for India.

Contrary to my expectations the response was initially lukewarm. The first two meetings were poorly attended. At the second meeting, Dinesh Verma suggested the creation of PC networks for information exchange. I talked about the establishment of an "open ended" network of various professionals, that could be utilized for developmental purposes. Arun Ahuja wanted to develop educational videos. Sandeep wanted to contribute to the primary education of poor children in India. Even though we all had slightly different approaches and interests, we had one thing in common -- we wanted an action group.

The basic goals of the group emerged from these discussions. We decided to concentrate on basic education for children in India. Sandeep, Deepak and I drafted a preliminary constitution. Sandeep and Deepak did most of the initial work. On the way to San Francisco, one evening, we discussed possible names for the group: we agreed upon the name Asha - "hope" in some Indian languages. Thanks to the effort of a lot of people the group has surpassed our initial aspirations.

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Asha CNJ Projects 2006

Asha Central NJ chapter received 9 completed project proposals in the year 2005-2006. The chapter decided to fund 7 projects for an overall amount of \$39,600. The projects span different areas from rehabilitation of physically and mentally challenged children, an after-school program for children of poor laborers, a novel mobile-library project for children in rural areas, to a balwadi for poor children. The projects are located in diverse states such as Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Project Name	Type of children	Amount (USD)	Place
Ashraya	Mentally challenged children	9,000	Kollam, Kerala
Gram Vikas	Poor children in rural areas	9,000	Bharuj, Gujarat
Srividyashram	Poor children in rural areas	5,000	Tanjavur, Tamilnadu
Prabodhini	Mentally challenged children	5,000	Pune, Maharashtra
Asha Samajik Vidyalaya	After school center for poor children in rural areas	4,600	Sherpur, Punjab
Eureka Library	Rural children	3,000	Tamil Nadu
Cheshire	Mentally challenged children	5,000	Coorg, Karnataka

Table1: Projects and funds allotted at a glance

Ashraya, Kollam, Kerala

Ashraya is an abode for challenged girl children, hailing from distressed economic background. Ashraya's mission is to mould each challenged daughter in to a self reliant and dignified individual with a will to successfully face the problems and challenges caused by their disability.

The project located in Kollam district of Kerala, started out with 3 children in 2000. Ashraya caters to girl children stricken with polio, cerebral palsy, mental retardation or multiple disability in the age group of 5 to 10 years.

To its daughters Ashraya provides:

- Accommodation, Food, Clothing, Medicare, Corrective Surgery & Physiotherapy
- In-house education up to 12th standard basing regular school syllabus / curriculum. Moral & Social Studies, Hygiene, Health, Sex Education & Counseling, Music, Art & Craft, Dance, Clay Modeling & Physical training

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- Specially designed courses / activities to bring out latent creative talents
- Livelihood oriented vocational training
- Meditation & Mantra chanting (traditional Indian Vedic hymns for speech therapy and memory improvement)
- Most importantly, love, affection and a sense of belonging that is absent in their own domestic background

Asha Central NJ and Purdue chapters has been involved with Ashraya since 2004. The existing facility at Ashraya was designed to cater to 15 children, and currently has a strength of 25. Asha's funds were used to extend the infrastructure including building a new class room/retiring room, toilets, and required furniture. In 2006, Asha funds are being used to pay for the education of Ashraya daughters. Till date, Asha has disbursed \$18,600.

Asha Samajik Vidyalaya, Sherpur, Punjab

Asha Samajik Vidyalaya (ASV), Sherpur is an after school program for the poor and underprivileged kids of daily wage laborers in a small village, called Sherpur, situated in the Sangrur district of Punjab (a North Indian state). The total population of Sherpur is around 3000 residential units. The education center was started in Sept-Oct 2003 in the open courtyard of Sant Ravidas Gurudwara. The primary goal of the program is to provide educational assistance to the poor children who are enrolled in the local government schools.

The center runs classes from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM on weekdays and teaches students from grade 1 to grade 9. There are a total of 236 (127 girls and 109 boys) students enrolled in the program and they are taught a variety of subjects (English, Hindi, Math, Science, Punjabi etc.). Currently there are a total of 6 full-time and 3 part-time teachers employed by the center who teach the above-mentioned subjects to the children.

In addition to providing traditional education, ASV Sherpur also instills healthy moral and social values in the kids. The children are also actively involved in contemporary issues like saving the environment. They have established a small nursery on a piece of community land with a little help from the local forest department. Providing basic computer education to children is also an item on the future agenda. ASV Sherpur also runs a sewing/knitting center to provide a source of income to the local people. 10 sewing machines have been donated by the forest department to aid this cause.

Asha CNJ has been sponsoring this project for 2 years now and has donated \$5000.00 for each year. This money has been used to purchase school uniforms for the kids, their school supplies, books, teachers' salaries, shoes for children, and frequent medical checkup of every child among other things. The center is constantly growing as more and more children

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continue to enroll in the program; the 2006-07 session saw an addition of an extra grade (grade 9) to the program.

It is truly inspirational and heart warming to see the earnest efforts made by the teachers and students to develop this center and obtain a well-rounded education respectively. They need a constant stream of support from us in the long term to help them achieve their goals.

Cheshire Homes, Coorg, Karnataka

Cheshire Homes India Coorg (CHIC) is a registered charitable organization in Pollibetta, Kodagu District, Karnataka. The Government granted 1.65 acres of land and buildings were completed in 2001 using contributions from local donors. The Day Center became operational in 2000. The Center caters to the education, therapy and vocational training of physically and mentally handicapped disabled children and adults from the underprivileged in the district.

CHIC has three centers of activity.

Day Center: The center was started in 2000 with 6 children. Now, there are 25 children and adults, on the average, availing the facility. The children are evaluated and are taught Activities of Daily Living Skills (ADLS) and functional academics. Therapists from JSS College, Mysore and trained CBR workers provide speech, Physio- and Occupational therapy. 2 vans have been provided free of charge for the PWD's to be picked up and dropped off.

Sahaya Vocational Center. Here, children over 10 and adult PWD's are trained in various activities. The aim is to empower them and integrate them into the mainstream of society. Products made include spun-bonded fabric and paper bags, greeting cards, letter paper, gift covers, phenyl and other products manufactured against orders. The Self Help Group in the center has been trained to manage the production and distribute the products. A Business Plan to establish a Book Binding Operation has been readied.

Sukh Shanthi Community Based Rehabilitation Program (CBR): This is an outreach program made available to all the PWD's in the District. This program helps the needy PWD's to access all the Government schemes in getting what is promised and due to them, such as special aids, allowances, health care etc.

CHIC has achieved many of its goals and objectives. But needs the active support of donor organizations to achieve and sustain all of them, now and into the future. Asha CNJ Chapter has donated \$5000.00 in 2006 towards playground equipment for the children at the Day Center and Book Binding equipment for the Vocational Center.

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Prabodhini Trust, Nashik, Maharashtra

On 1st Jan 1977 the work of the Probhodhini trust took the first step in the development of Mentally Challenged Individuals. This work was initiated by Mrs. Rajani Limaye along with Dr. Shirish Sule (Psychiatrist) and Mrs. Kamalabai Sarada. They had to undergo many problems in the initial years. But with the support and the directions given by the well-wishers, donors and colleagues all the obstacles were overcome. Today under Probhodhini trust 350 mentally challenged individuals are getting trained for a life they can lead with dignity and self respect. Today the trust is recognized by the Government of India. Some of the activities are supported by the Government as well.

Probhodhini Sheltered Workshop:

A Training and Rehabilitation center for adult mentally challenged Individuals.

Most of the mentally challenged individuals often have some other disability as well. Hence it is quite challenging to evaluate what type of tasks the student should be trained on.

Objectives of the Workshop:

- Vocational training as per the cognitive, physical and mental ability of the individual - Simple & Repetitive tasks
- Opportunity to work
- Making them self sufficient and independent.
- Making them a productive and important part of the family and the society.
- The workshop gives students a sense of creation which makes them independent and gives them confidence and happiness.

The students are remunerated with an amount ranging from Rs 50/ to Rs 250/month depending on their ability. This amount is deposited in the bank on their account. The money they earn gives them a social standing in the family.

Equal importance is given to the development of the Social Skills among students such as identifying amount of money, doing simple calculations, behaving in the public and in work places. Also Manners and social etiquettes are taught. All of this leads to self-confidence which enhances their inborn qualities. To support this various therapies are used

Almost in all exhibitions in the city, the workshop participates to exhibit different products made by the students. This makes people aware of the abilities of these Mentally Retarded individuals.



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The Workshop ensures that the family is also involved in the process of rehabilitation for all students who get trained in the workshop, special emphasis is given to rehabilitate them back in the society. Till now 27 students have been rehabilitated. They now earn monthly, from Rs 500 to Rs 4000 .All these students are working very successfully and the workshop keeps a follow up of them.

Some examples of students working off-workshop: Gas-stations, Tea-Coffee Vending machine, STD Booths, Simple job-work at small scale work shops

Srividyashram, Tanjavur, Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu Government in India now recognizes that the students in rural areas are at a disadvantage compared to those studying in urban areas and that they suffer for want of an adequate working knowledge of English. Why? Is it because the children in the villages are less gifted or less intelligent? Or, is it because the quality and standard of education available in the villages is poor? Was it a mistake not to have given sufficient importance to the teaching of English in school curriculum?

An experiment was launched in June, 2002 in a village called Vadakurangaduthurai in Papanasam Taluk of Thanjavur District. The small hamlet nestles on the left bank of the River Cauvery, 21 kms from Kumbakonam on the bus route to Thiruvaiyaru. A school by name **Srividyasram Nursery & Primary School , with English medium** came up in that village, with infrastructure that would be the envy of any other well endowed school in any town . It was the effort of a few persons with a conscience , who wanted the see what difference quality, modern, value-based education could do to the poor village children. Persons with vast experience in several fields – both in India and outside – founded **Sri Ramani Ranganayaki Trust**, a charitable institution, that has spent over Rs 50 lakhs in establishing the school with all amenities– spacious modern class rooms, scores and scores

of teaching aids, a good computer room and an audio-visual room, a big library, play ground and play area for the children , a modern kitchen and a big dining hall to serve midday meal to 320 children.....

Continuous in-house training that is being given to the locally recruited teachers is paying rich dividends. The village children are learning well and fast. They are growing into well disciplined, knowledgeable children. They are imbibing the right values and it is hoped that they will grow as model citizens. **It is seen that they are quick on the uptake and are not at all inferior to the city-bred children in any way.** The parents of these children are poor agricultural labourers, who are not employed throughout the year. They can not, with their measly income, meet the full cost of education given to their children.

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Plans to upgrade the school :

The school will have 230 children in June, 2006 in 7 classes (10 sections) from Pre-KG to Std – IV and we need an equal number of donors / sponsors to give them food and education.

More than 3 acres of land has been purchased to start the Middle School (Standards VI to VIII) by June, 2008, the High School (Standards IX and X) by June, 2011 and the Higher Secondary School (Standards XI and XII) by June, 2013.

Eureka Village Libraries Movement, Tamil Nadu

An innovative way of providing good reading for the children of Tamil Nadu. This project gives poor children dwelling in villages an opportunity to learn and read a variety of stories and essays that provide them with information on science and other topics interesting and important (eg. health, tsunami etc). The project is run and supervised by Aid-Chennai. The reading material is printed in Chennai and through a network that consists of NGOs, cluster library coordinators, unpaid village volunteers stories are brought to the children at a running low cost of \$30 (approx. Rs 1500) per year. Each Village library is initially given a well designed library bag with flaps for 30 story cards, 30 small low cost books, 20 costlier books, registration and membership cards (nominal one time fee). Feedback color cards are supplied to the readers to understand their interests and to improve on supplying books and stories. Every month more story cards are added to the library which are given to the village volunteers by the cluster library coordinator. Instead of providing all the villages with exactly the same set of books, different books are provided to each village so that they can be exchanged. A cluster consists of about 50 villages, and about 10 clusters will have an AID Library Network Center that will coordinate the dispatching of reading material. The goal is to do this for about 5000 villages and prove its feasibility to the government in the hope that it will become a govt. undertaking and be deployed to all Tamil Nadu villages. Asha-CNJ has sent funds, for one year, to introduce this project in a 100 new villages.

NOTE: If you would like to know more about our projects, please contact our project coordinators Arvind Ayyer (ayyer@physics.rutgers.edu) or Praveen Gopalakrishnan (Gopalakrishnan.praveen@gmail.com)

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