



Asha Deep

Asha for Education – Madison chapter

Fall 1999 Newsletter

To Catalyze Social Change in India by Focusing on Basic Education

Contents

1. Local activity:
 - Asha Open House
 - Status of Funded Projects
 - UW Homecoming Stall
 - Asha Stars
2. Asha-wide activity:
 - Work-an-Hour '99
 - Asha Conference
 - Asha 2000
3. Rejuvenate India Movement

How to contribute

- Volunteer for Asha Activities
- Become an Asha Star
- Contribute money (see last page)
- Buy Asha Merchandise
 - Year 2000 Calendar
 - T-Shirts
 - Greeting Cards
 - Mugs
- Participate in our awareness activities

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Asha Open House

On August 7 1999, Asha-Madison held an Open House to spread word about *Asha for Education* and its activities. Besides allowing us to raise awareness about Asha, the Open House also provided us with an opportunity to exchange ideas with the attendees regarding ways of enhancing community involvement in our activities.

The Open House was attended by over 30 people and lasted for about two hours. A 15-minute presentation covered the history, objectives and activities of *Asha for Education*. This was followed by a video screening on Swanirvar - a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in West Bengal, which is currently being supported by Asha-Madison.

The attendees were eager to know more about Asha projects. In addition, they suggested raising funds through community gatherings, interactions with corporate firms, and Internet advertising.

An encouraging amount of enthusiasm was witnessed among the attendees to further Asha's goals by volunteering and donating money. Moreover, it helped in strengthening Asha's relations with the community.

Status of funded projects

Little Stars



Little Stars is a school for street children in Varanasi run by Asha Pandey. Asha-Madison has been supporting it for one year.

At present, it has 200 children (upto 4th grade) and has recently started a vocational training program. The school has also obtained additional funding of \$5000 from Infospace Corporation, Seattle. However, the school is having trouble in receiving funds since it does not have FCRA clearance, which is necessary for NGOs in India in order to receive funds from abroad. We are currently exploring ways of solving this problem.

Swanirvar

This project runs three schools near Aandharmanik village in rural West-Bengal. Recently, we sent them a sum of \$4000. Half of that amount was raised by us and the rest was a matching donation from

Share-And-Care Foundation. The \$2000 we raised includes a donation of \$1000 by the Returned Peace Corps of Wisconsin.

In May '99, Tirthankar Mukherjee, who is associated with Swanirvar was in Madison to make a presentation about their current activities.

New Projects

The projects focus group is reviewing new projects to be taken up by Asha-Madison. Among eleven projects all over India (in Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra, Delhi, Assam and Manipur) we have shortlisted 3 projects for further followup. We welcome suggestions for projects from you.

Asha Stall at UW Homecoming '99



An Asha stall was set up at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's annual homecoming as a part of the *Celebration of Cultures* on October 10th at the Pyle Center. This event was an opportunity for Asha-Madison to create awareness about illiteracy in India by distributing flyers, and to raise funds by selling snacks.

Around two hundred people attended the event. A total of \$194 was raised.

Work-an-Hour '99

Work-an-Hour is an event in which all Asha chapters get together to raise funds for projects that are too large to be supported by a single chapter. Each year on India's Independence Day, August 15th, people

contribute one hour's pay towards educating underprivileged children in India. Asha focuses on a few projects annually in the hope of making a positive impact on them. Work-an-Hour '98 generated a total of \$32,000.

This year Asha received six project proposals for Work-an-Hour '99. The Work-an-Hour projects working group ensured that all proposals met exacting guidelines. Nineteen chapters participated in the selection process to choose the following four projects:

- Vivekananda Education Society: building a school for child laborers in West Bengal.
- Seva Nilayam: supporting a shelter for homeless girl students in Tamil Nadu.
- Bhoomi Heen Sewa Samiti: educating the landless in Uttar Pradesh.
- Anandwan: vocational training and rehabilitation of the rural blind, deaf-mute and orphan children.

The financial goal for Work-an-Hour '99 was to raise \$40,000 by August 16th. However, it turned out to be much more successful than imagined: 1150 pledges were received and a total of over \$54,000 was raised. For more details, see <http://www.ashanet.org/workanhour/>

Asha Stars

The typical duration of support for an Asha project is one to three years. As an organization with a large transient population (students) it becomes difficult for Asha to commit time and money for long-term projects. The requirement of projects requiring sustained support has resulted in the Asha Stars program.

Under this program, a group of five people can sponsor a project. The members of this group, Asha Stars, are committed to supporting the project for five to ten years. At least one person in the group is encouraged to visit the project-site each year. At present, 15% of Asha projects are being supported by Asha Stars.

Potential Asha stars are welcome to select new projects that could be supported by this program. For

more information, please contact Neeraj Arora (narora@bus.wisc.edu).

ASHA Conference 1999

The second Asha conference was organized by Asha-MIT at Boston during May 29th-31st. Volunteers from 16 Asha chapters in the US (including Madison) attended. The goals of the conference were: (a) interaction between volunteers from different chapters, (b) gaining a better understanding of Asha's philosophy, and (c) developing a long-term vision.

The discussion about Asha's philosophy centered around whether our focus should exclusively be on basic education or whether education should be viewed within the context of overall local development. A general consensus was reached that ultimately, it is important to consider development in all its aspects - a holistic approach. However, it was agreed that Asha should act on a case-by-case basis rather than come up with a rigid rule.

Everybody agreed that we should promote projects that utilize and improve the existing formal education structure and aim at self-sufficiency in a fixed number of years. Emphasis should be placed on seeking projects in remote areas.



Through several discussions, a ten-year vision, short-term goals and long-term goals of Asha were identified.

The long-term goals for Asha's activities in India include: (a) working on empowering people in India to demand education as a right from the government instead of as a largesse, (b) creating positive examples

of self-sustaining change in education and development in India, (c) helping build up a network of social workers and activists in India, (d) creating a network of Asha-India chapters that train volunteers in colleges and universities to be socially aware and responsible, and (e) continuing with Asha-2000 methodology (refer to accompanying article) of identifying impact of Asha projects.

The long-term goals for Asha's activities in US include: (a) work on setting up Asha chapters in all the major US cities, (b) develop links with like-minded groups (AID, CRY, ILP, etc.) and do joint projects, (c) learn about issues in depth, and (d) make raising awareness an important aspect of our functioning by organizing discussions and lectures.

Asha 2000

Since its inception eight years ago, Asha has been supporting NGOs in India by establishing and running schools and other learning centers for underprivileged children. We have often asked ourselves the questions: Are we addressing the right issues? Are we making a difference? Are we doing enough? In an attempt to answer such questions, volunteers visit projects for half to full day site visits. However, these visits only provide an overview of the projects and not a thorough understanding of all the issues.

Asha 2000 is an attempt to understand the fundamental issues faced by the people whom we are trying to help. It was proposed by Shanmuga, an Asha volunteer from Princeton, who is completing his Ph.D. in February 2000 and will be taking up a post-doctorate position in India. After moving to India, he will be visiting 50 Asha projects all over the country, spending 3-5 days living at each project.

The goal of this effort is threefold: to take a comprehensive look at each of the projects, to compare them, and to understand the critical issues and challenges faced by them. This study would lead to sharing of successful ideas and strategies across various projects.

More importantly, Asha 2000 will help us understand the critical issues at the grassroots level. For example, poverty is often cited as the single most important reason for children not attending school.

However, we have found that often the real issue is the quality, relevance, and accessibility of education rather than cost.

Rejuvenate India Movement

In April '99, Dr. B. V. Parameshwar Rao, a social entrepreneur from India, visited Madison on the request of the Asha chapter here. He was in the US to find out if Indians here could unite to work towards a better India - an India that is a functional democracy where needs of *all* the people are met. By doing this, he wanted the people concerned about India's problems to find enduring avenues for realizing a better India. He visited a number of cities in the US as part of this endeavor.

The Rejuvenate India Movement (RIM) was born out of the shared aspirations of hundreds of Indians living abroad. In a matter of months, Indians from various walks of life, including volunteers from many well-known non-profit organizations (Asha, AID, ILP, ICA, etc.), have been inspired and motivated to work in solidarity towards a common goal.

RIM volunteers took a pledge at the first national meeting (August 1999) to assist and promote the initiatives of local people for solving problems faced by their community.

As a first step, RIM will establish a program entitled *Stimulated Volunteerism* to foster volunteerism, particularly among the youth. This will serve as a starting point to reach RIM's long-term

goals.

In addition, RIM is considering facilitating a cleanliness campaign in India as a one-year project. Currently, RIM volunteers are searching for avenues through which they can assist local groups in India in implementing the campaign. In the US, they have begun to enlist the active participation of various Indian organizations. The situation will be assessed at RIM's second national meeting during thanksgiving.

Through these actions, RIM hopes to initiate a peaceful movement that will effect a positive social change in India. For more information visit the website at www.indiamovement.org.

Upcoming Events of Interest

Nov 24th, 6 pm, 3650, Humanities Bldg: *Medha Patkar*, one of the leading figures of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* will be presenting an update on the situation in the Narmada Valley. She will also be talking about her vision of just and sustainable development.

Nov 23rd, 6:30 pm, 1100 Grainger Hall: *Sholay* - The most successful commercial film in Indian history. Directed by Ramesh Sippy. Starring: Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra, Sanjeev Kumar, Amjad Khan, Hema Malini, and Jaya Bhaduri.

Nov 30th, 6:30 pm, 1100 Grainger Hall: *Hyderabad Blues* - Varun, an Indian living in the United States for 12 years, returns home in order for his parents to arrange his marriage. Directed by Nagesh Kukunoor. Starring: Nagesh Kukunoor, Vikram Inamdar, Rajshri Nair, Anoop Rao, and Anne Chengappa.

Orissa Cyclone Relief Effort

Early November, there was a devastating cyclone in Orissa. It is estimated that about 20,000 people were killed.

AID (Association for India's Development), another US based developmental NGO like Asha, has been working to raise funds for providing relief to affected people. In Madison, through individual initiatives of Asha volunteers, more than \$600 has been raised and sent to AID. More information about AID's efforts can be found at <http://www.aidindia.org/orissa>.

You can contribute to this relief effort by writing a check in favor of AID (with memo: "Orissa Cyclone Relief") and sending the check to: AID, P.O. Box 149, College Park, MD 20741. Credit card payments can be made by calling (301)513-0565.

Asha for Education Contribution Form

- I am enclosing \$ _____
- I would like to contribute \$ _____ every month.
(Make checks payable to "Asha for Education")

Name : _____

Address : _____

Phone : _____

Email : _____

- I would like to be an Asha Star
- Please add me to the mailing list

All contributions are tax-deductible.