



Asha for Education: An Overview of Three Projects

Asha for Education raises awareness of issues and supports projects concerned with the education of underprivileged children in various parts of India. Asha works with several non-governmental and governmental organizations in India to bring about positive socio-economic change. Our interventions include infrastructural support such as classrooms, teacher's salaries, meal programs for children, providing learning aids, and promoting socially-meaningful curriculum development and child-centered learning techniques. Asha also is actively involved in campaigning for innovative education techniques in government schools and is closely involved with other organizations in reviewing the government's curriculum framework

The projects we partner with are aware of and sensitive to the special learning requirements of groups such as street children, children of prostitutes, children with speech, vision and hearing impairments, slow learners and physically and mentally challenged children. In addition, they also attempt to provide educational resource centers and teacher training facilities. Asha is also sensitive to preserving the culture of the groups we work with (for instance, many of India's indigenous tribes have their own unique culture). The groups supported by Asha are diverse in their location, target population and approach to education. However, in one way, they are all similar. Asha supports only groups that demonstrably have no political or religious affiliations.

The volunteers of Asha for Education play an active role in identifying, reviewing, approving and monitoring the projects that we fund. Individual volunteers from each chapter do a site visit of the project to study it before funding is approved. Currently Asha for Education supports 152 projects all over India. Volunteers often have a non-monetary personal involvement with projects, so that they can work in close partnership with the project. Asha's aim is not just to improve access, but to make education a more meaningful experience for children and their communities.

Sandeep Pandey himself has been personally involved in a number of projects around Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Asha-Lucknow was established by Sandeep and it works with projects in Ballia, Varanasi, Rajatalab, and Lalpur. Many of these projects deal with education and community development in a number of surrounding villages as well. Further the work being done by Asha Lucknow at the Asha Ashram in Lalpur, and the Manaviya Shiksha-Sanskar Sansthan near Kanpur that is run by Deepak Gupta, cofounder of Asha for Education, are both commendable efforts in developing communities to make them self sufficient and self-reliant. What follows below are the details of projects that are close to the hearts of Sandeep, Deepak and various chapters of Asha for Education.

Asha Ashram at Lalpur

Sandeep has set up the Asha Ashram in a very poor (dalit) village called Lalpur near Lucknow. This center ("ashram") has undertaken a number of activities here including basic education for children, bee keeping, healthcare, etc.

The ashram plays an active role at the local level and in Asha-activities at a global level. The goal of the ashram is to bring about social change by developing a self-sustained, socially responsible community, by imparting skills that can make the people in the village self-reliant. The ashram will function as a community center for various grass-roots activities, such as women's issues, initiatives for tackling unemployment etc. The ashram is presently delivering educational and health services, areas that were identified by the villagers as being the ones they most urgently need, free of cost.

The ashram is developing an educational model based on a philosophy that focuses on cultivating values for a just human order and promoting skills that will help a person to become self-reliant. It is also formulating its own curriculum to inculcate the values that lead to happy and satisfying human relationships. The first book that follows this new curriculum, 'Muskaan', is being tried at out at various Asha centers. The ashram's education program provides an opportunity to its students to develop their creative talents. Art and craft activities form an essential part of the education process. Local craft and artisans find a place of pride in the ashram's education program. The ashram also provides health services to the villagers of the area based on a combination

of homeopathy, naturopathy, ayurveda and allopathy. As Lalpur continues to have no electricity, Asha for Education is developing alternative energy solutions. Bee-keeping provides the ashram residents with a profession that can earn them a livelihood. A number of villagers have received training in bee-keeping at the Asha Bee-keeping Training Center in Kaithi, Varanasi and through practical experience at Lalpur. The ashram is managed by Asha Lucknow volunteers, primarily Sandeep and Mahesh. Most of the ashram's workers are from Lalpur village itself and are closely associated with the activities of the ashram.

FACT SHEET -

- Established -1998
- Funds disbursed in 2001-\$22,196
 - 2000 \$ 5,000 from Asha Seattle
 - 1999 \$ 200 from Asha Cornell
 - 1999 \$ 800 from Asha MIT
 - 1999 \$ 10,000 from Work an Hour
- Chapters involved- Asha Lucknow
- Beneficiaries- 81 families

Navjyoti Swawalamban Sewa Sansthan at Rajatalab

Nandlal Master runs the Navjyoti project in Rajatalab, Uttar Pradesh. Nandlal met Sandeep in Varanasi and started this development effort in Rajatalab in 1994. The Navjyoti Swawalamban Sewa Sansthan now runs three activities in the surrounding villages of the area. Nandlal's idea was to provide education to the children in a few villages surrounding the Rajatalab area. Since this is a community of Banarasi saree weavers, most of the children work from 8am-6pm, and attend classes only later in the evening. The Navjyoti Sansthan currently runs about 10 evening schools at centers in various villages in the area. Each center has an average of 30-40 children. The center is usually located at someone's house or is run out in the open under the shade of a tree. All the teachers at these centers are volunteers, with higher secondary or undergraduate level education, belonging to the community, and fired with the zeal to uplift their brethren. The Navjyoti Sansthan has also started a Mahila Mandal to work with the local women to

implement a scheme to save money regularly, consolidate their money together with one person and so that they can take loans from this cash reserve during emergencies. After attaining a certain threshold of savings the money is transferred to a bank. This scheme has been introduced recently and has about 25 women taking part in it. Local youth movements spread awareness about social and global issues. They are running a Silai Prashikshan Kendra in Kalliur and Mehdiganj to provide tailoring classes for adolescent girls.

FACT SHEET-

- Established- 1994
- Funds disbursed in 2001- \$ 5000
- Chapters currently involved- Asha Chicago, Asha Lucknow
- Beneficiaries- 500 families

Manaviya Shiksha Sanskar Sansthan (MS3)

Deepak Gupta, cofounder of Asha for Education with Sandeep, has started the Manaviya Shiksha Sanskar Sansthan (MS3) project in Mandhana, near the Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur. This project focuses on self-reliance achieved by following a certain way of living. Some of the features of the MS3 project are:

Some of the features of the courses offered are:

- The Institute offers 1/2/3 years courses.
- Only 10 students are admitted every year to ensure personal attention for every one.
- The Institute plans that four students in every batch will be specially trained to run (in pairs of two) such institutes, to ensure that every institute leads to the creation of two new institutes each year, thus multiplying the number of institutes exponentially.

There are three aspects to the MS 3 project:

Helping children of migrant labor with primary education

The children of migrant labor moved from place to place with their parents in their search for a livelihood, and had no scope to get any basic education. They often grew up with few vocational skills except manual labor for construction work. In order to alleviate this, there were efforts in the Kanpur area to hold classes at the construction site for the children. The concept of the MS3 Asha center grew out of the desire to provide life skills to the children of migrant labor. MS3 continues to run classes in Kanpur at construction sites. The class aims to help the children to learn to read and write and hopefully help them become less susceptible to exploitation in their lives. MS3 volunteers counsel the migrant labour to help overcome day to day problems.

Providing vocational training for children of migrant labor

In order to strike the root of the vicious cycle of migrant labor and subsequent exploitation, illiteracy, lack of life skills, MS3 has been trying to create a four-year program for children from families of migrant labor or prospective migrant labor. The idea is that the young children get vocational training when they are at the institute. Once they graduate, they have the option of going back to their village to put their newly learned skills to use. They can also train other people who are interested in gaining these skills and show them how to sustain themselves. MS3 also supports graduates who want to continue with higher education. So far, a syllabus has been created focusing on life skills along with an introduction to 'Jeevan Vidya', a philosophy of living; expected to help achieve material contentment, mental happiness and social cohesion.

17 students have joined the Sansthan. Most students are from Chattisgarh state, which is the place of origin of migrant construction workers in the Kanpur area. The project expects to have 10 students per year, adding up to 30 students at the end of three years.

Making MS3 self sustaining

One of the main goals of the MS3 Asha center is to become self-sustained by making use of the economic activities within the Sansthan. Honey production, dairy, ayurvedic medicine, carpentry, agriculture and software development are few of the activities at the Sansthan in pursuit of this goal. The skills gained by students at the Sansthan are in the

above mentioned areas. Further money is made from all these activities and expansion plans are also in progress to make sure that the project does indeed become self-sustaining.

FACT SHEET-

- Established- 1998
- Funds disbursed in 2001- \$ 17,867
 - 2000 \$ 3,000 from Asha Seattle
 - 2000 \$ 4,300 from Asha Dallas
 - 2000 \$ 5,500 from Asha Master
 - 2000 \$ 3,400 from Asha Silicon Valley
 - 1999 \$ 1,500 from Asha Arizona
 - 1999 \$ 10,000 from Work an Hour
- Chapters currently involved- Asha Dallas, Silicon Valley, Asha Stars from Asha NYC/NJ