

With children till grade 7 we work on things beyond syllabus like song, dance, activities, computer classes, etc. We also work on specific learning issues that children may have in smaller groups based on learning levels.

We also take the children on picnics, summer camps when we get volunteers to come and support our effort.

Last year we had many volunteers near new year and they took a computer apart and walked the children through the various parts.

For children from 8-10 we support them for their syllabus.

In all there are 6 teachers and around 20 volunteers who help us.

Q & A

Q: How many children are there and in each session?

A: Session 1 – 70 children with 3 teachers,

Session 2- 40 children and 2 teachers,

Session 3- 50 children and 3 teachers, we also take computer classes and provide a certificate after a year for training.

Q: How do you decide how the group the children and when?

A: At the time of admission we do an assessment of the children.

Q: Where do these children study?

A: It caters to children from the slums. Many are from the BMC (Municipality) nagar nigam schools, some also go to private schools.

Q: How do you access if the children are learning?

A: We have informal examination cycles every 3 months or at times based on when we feel a child is doing quite well.

Q: How do you raise funds at Asha-Mumbai?

A: Dr. Sunita has her group of doctors who support us. We also have some friends in corporates who donate some of their shares each year towards around Rs.10 lakhs. We do not host fundraising events as such.

We also heard from Digvijay.

I have been going to the Asha center for 3 yrs now. I study in a Hindi medium private school.

Q: When do you go the center?

A: I go to school from 7-12 and then to the center from 5-8.

Q: What about the other children in your class?

A: Most of the children in my class also come to the center.

Q: Do you have an idea of what your school fees is?

A: Yes, Rs.1000/year.

2) Asha Assam

We have been associated with Asha since 1999, locally we work as an organization called Asha-Darshan and run both school and other community activities. We also now have a FCRA of our own as not all activities are education related.

In education we run 11 schools and this year 4 of these have been taken over by the government. We teach in both Bodo and Assamese depending on the community.

We were running mid-day meals for the children, but we had to close these due to delay in funds from Asha-US.

We have approached Gandhi Samati and other local organizations to find ways to fundraise locally.

As our teachers are local we have also worked on teacher training – Lakshmi and Margret spend some time with the teachers to help them engage with children better. We had also organized a workshop on using comics as a medium to involve children and also bring to attention social issues. This time we focussed on communicating the information on RTE through comics.

We also had a parliament for children to help them understand governance.

Well our association with Asha in the US has been well delayed. We worked on getting the govt give us land. When we received it we were supposed to receive support from WAH...when funds are sent it is not always clear what it was sent for and we ended up using funds sent for education for construction.



What started as a pre-primary school has now become a high school. We use some help from local govt school to write examinations. We got some support from the govt, some from spare funds and local donations to manage. The state government this year said that they will not give us textbooks they have been giving for 5 schools (not taken up from govt). We explained that our other centres were taken up by govt and that we share our training resource persons. But they had got instructions from BEO not to give to unregistered schools as they may then ask for additional support that they are not willing to provide. Nonetheless, while the local govt could not give us books for this year they gave us old books that are not covered by the instructions.

We are interested in public ownership of schools by parents so they have a role on how schools are run.

Our schools are not the best quality due to limited infrastructure, continued support and limited training. We have been exploring vocational training, bamboo training, but in reality we are not able to do more. We have also received land to start a weaving centre.

We have also approached Rajiv Gandhi fund, but these are only with the schools the govt has taken up (at least supported last year) for the improvement of the quality of at least these schools.

Even with the limited we can do with our schools we have had some successes – our children do very well in the Navodaya examinations (govt residential school).

Our operations are run in a transparent fashion and even though we have not been able to pay regularly many of our staff have stayed since they are as well aware of our situation. Also when we pay the most we can pay is Rs.3000. In reality our people are having to make hard choices every day.

Though we have FCRA we are also working on 12A and hope that we will be able to work with Tata Trust.

However, the biggest bottleneck of our work has been consistent support from Asha. Asha volunteers really need to visit us as they seem to be unable to imagine how things are. It is difficult.

We were supposed to have teleconference, but we haven't had it for 4-5 months. We don't know how to believe in them when they suddenly disappear. Asha SV is also not able to organize site visits.

3) Asha Manipur

We also run schools in Manipur under Asha-Darshan, but here there are other issues like a very high HIV rate in the children we work with and we are working with World vision to provide treatment as well as awareness of the same.



Q & A on Asha-Assam and Asha-Manipur

Q: How did 4 of your centres get converted to govt schools?

A: We had maintained relationship with the govt in these schools and we had supported them through admin like children's surveys that they had required. The govt gives books for the year and gives money once in a while as lump some and we need to

manage the rest on our own.

The issue with the lumpsome is that UIFA knows that the govt officials are carrying such a large amount. The money we get is after the officials give them their cut.

To be more accurate I should say that we got support for 4 schools from the govt for one year. We are asking again this year, but there is some uncertainty about it so far.

Vallabh: It is perhaps best to find alternative sources of funding or find out ways to have the govt accept the remaining centers as their schools. The needs of the project are fairly large and it is difficult for someone else to step in.

Recommendation of the group to Asha-US is to be more responsive and transparent in their process. The disappointment of the groups on the ground is great and though there was some improvements in communication through IFG – 8 yrs back since it has become inactive it has been difficult.

There is a communication gap and it is not clear how it can be filled. Perhaps, this will be a consideration for the coordination team that will be standing for elections in May.

Q: Which standard do the Manipur schools go to?

A: They go up to 7th grade.

Q: What happens to the children following this?

A: The children merge into the govt high schools. There is no TC/registration required for them to join the schools so far and though the children need to travel a bit they can as they are older.

4) Asha-Chennai



- There are no significant changes in Asha Chennai.
- We work with a corporation school – we are working with one and support only one teacher in the other. One development is that the teachers wrote to the officials regarding the lack of books and uniforms. While we cannot say that this is the impact of interacting with us I think we did have a role to play in the same.

The govt has also accepted that there has been delay in their end for the books and uniforms. However, these are yet to arrive.

- We have been working on computer training with govt schools. However, there is not written MOU with the govt regarding our work with schools and if something goes wrong we simply need to pull out.
- The Balvadis we were supporting have asked for teachers only with Montessori training and we are unable to employ additional teachers there. They are, however, actively asking us to give them materials to use in the classrooms. We are looking to apply RTI to get more info about the materials the govt is supposed to provide them.
- The other issue with the Balvadis is that when the teachers assigned does not come the Asha teachers are there and know about it. This has become a bit of a political issue for them.
- We have partnered with an organization called 'Think' – to provide computer training sessions.
- Computer based education material we were created is halted due to the availability of this kind of material in plenty.
- While we are no longer providing computers to schools we do provide peripherals like tables, cupboards, etc needed to make the computers accessible at the schools.
- We are continuing the scholarship program through the SAC for 105 children. These include
 - Rural children to go to colleges
 - City schools
 - Special children
- We have a stable base of 7-8 volunteers.
- We continue to find it difficult to attract new volunteers.
- There are two additional volunteers who help us with accounts for the scholarship program.
- We are interested in the RTE program and want to see how we can get the children we support through scholarship into good schools.
- We have used the ASSET test to check on the schools we work with and find that half the children follow concepts, but half have a lot of difficulty.

Q & A Asha Chennai