



ADOBE PARIKRMA PARTNERSHIP

JUNE 06 – FEBRUARY -07

The period being reported is eight months from when the sponsorship of the Parikrma school got confirmed. In 2006 we had several visits from Rashmi Soni and Michelle which finally led to the visit of Bruce Chizen and Naresh Gupta on the 8th of March 06. It was during this visit that Bruce Chizen committed to sponsor the Jaynagar school for the new academic year, over and above the media and technology grant that had been confirmed earlier. The money was routed through the Asha for Education a funding agency from US for tax conveniences but the whole administrative process took a long time and we received the grant only on 2nd Nov 06. We received USD 22651 for the media and computer lab and USD 49432 for the sponsorship of 145 children for one year.

We will present the activities and outcomes through the key areas that make the Circle of Life...academics, nutrition, health care and community development. We shall also highlight some of our work with the government and other NGOs, enlist some of our challenges and work out the plans for the future.

ACADEMICS

The academic year of 2005-06 began on 8th June06, but preparation for this new academic year began from January 06 with a thorough survey of the slums for deserving children and families by our own team of social workers. As the admission was open for only 30 children and the first priority is always given to siblings, we identified only 40 children of age 5 for the preliminary scrutiny. First, the social workers did a thorough check on their family background to ensure that the family was economically deserving (about Rs 1500 as a monthly income and not more) and was sincere and serious about their children's education. This was done through physical examination of the house and neighbourhood and referral checks with neighbours and other NGOs. In these cases referrals with employers was not possible as most parents were daily wage labourers. It was important to ensure that we did not enroll migratory labour children as that would

preclude continuity. Second, our psychiatrists did a screening of both the children and parents to determine any borderline mental retardation. Then, the children were made to go through a school readiness test.

We were able to select 34 children including the siblings, for the New Year's admission. This time too we had received 110 applications from children of varied age and economic categories which we had to reject. We received enquiries from two privileged families who had heard nice comments about our school system and were willing to admit their children for a fee. The month of April is quite a sight to see at all our schools because of the long queues for admission which invariably blocks the roads and sometimes disturbs the neighbourhood.

The 05-06 academic year closed on 23rd April 06 and the 06-07 academic year began on the June 06. As such, the month of May was a holiday in all schools in the state but as in every other year, we had to keep our school open right through the conventional Summer Holidays. Most of the teachers were given a break for about 20 days and the school was run with a few teachers and volunteers. We have one dedicated volunteer who lives in Australia who comes to India during this period every year just to anchor the entire Summer Program activity. The children came to school every alternative day and participated in sports, music, and art programs. They were even showed films and taken for field trips and picnics. The idea was to ensure they continued with the routine of coming to school everyday and did not get employed during the break. But most importantly it was to ensure they did not starve during the holidays.

The last few days of May and early June were set aside for Teachers Orientation and Training. The 4 new teachers that were hired were sent to the slums for Familiarisation and Orientation. We believe that the teachers cannot perform well if they are not aware of the children's backgrounds and adopt an empathetic approach to teaching. The senior teachers were sent for a 10 day residential Leadership Development program called "The Growth Lab" that has been exclusively developed for Parikrma by well known trainers and HR specialists of this country. The new teachers were given a 7 day rigorous training on creative teaching methods. Our approach is to make classes interactive and engaging through projects rather than dry lessons from books. I believe that it is this approach that has engaged the children to come to school regularly with enthusiasm.

The first day of school was a poignant one. We now have 145 children of which 81 are girls and 64 boys. It was good to see all the parents who came to drop the children to school. The rest of the children came by bus provided by us. As the number of children increase, it is getting imperative for us to

make arrangements for another bus. So far as our children have been undernourished and tiny, it was possible for us to squeeze in many children in a bus. But now as they are growing and becoming healthy we are unable to fit in as many children in one bus!!

Expansion program is as per earlier plans. With the Adobe grant we were able to source very high end Lenovo computers with UPS back up systems and printers. We have also acquired laptops and LCD projector to screen lessons in the classrooms to make them more alive and interesting. The children have also established a Cine Club and select films that they want to see over the weekend in school. They have even elected a President amongst them who supervises the smooth functioning of the Club for a term.

The new Computer Lab is the most used area in the school. Apart from the regular computer lessons that is already scheduled in the monthly calendar, many other lessons are also conducted in the computer lab with the aid of technology. Our children continue to use the internet to research on various topics that are being taught in class. We have also linked with volunteers in England who are correcting our children's English by mail.

We were fortunate to be supported by the Government of Holland who funded the expenses of sending a highly trained educationist from Amsterdam who initiated the "Differentiation in Learning" program. As the funds did not cover the entire expenses of having this trainer in India for one and half years, Parikrma bore some of the expenses as the impact of this training was evident to all of us in a short time. In order to ensure continuity of this project we identified some key teachers who were given the responsibility to supervise the classroom teaching and plan the curriculum accordingly. A Resource Team has been established with the Principals of all our four schools and senior teachers and coordinators. The Resource Team meets once in 15 days to review and take a consensus decision on the curriculum, assessments, and child specific issues.

Weekly assessments, monthly tests and term exams have been conducted. The children seemed to have done well, especially the younger ones who have had the benefit of being introduced to school at the appropriate age. We have identified an education agency that will do the third party audit of all our children's abilities and suggest what level the children are in academics. This study will not be cheap but it has been decided that this is the first step in preparing our children for the public exams.

Life Skills training that was given to some of our teachers and this has had great impact in the school as the required amount of hours for Life Skills continue. Life Skills is being anchored by one of our senior Resource Team

members who comes with many years of training in the area of mental health and adolescent issues.

Our children have visited Adobe, Yahoo, Motorola, IBM, HSBC to see how these organizations function. The employees of all these organizations have taken time off to spend time with the children and give valuable advice. We believe that our children need to aspire to work in such companies and develop enough self esteem to think it is totally possible. We have many budding software engineers in our school!

As our objective is to ensure that our children integrate with the mainstream as early as possible, we have been sending our children for many inter schools competitive events. Our children won the second prize in the Inter School Science meet where they presented their project on "Solid Waste Management" They were also awarded the most Creative Project award. This is an affirmation that not only did the children comprehend the concept, but reproduced it well in clay and art material, but most importantly, presented it to the judges and audience in coherent English. We are ourselves amazed to remember that just a few years ago, some of these children were themselves garbage collectors on the streets.

This year our children shone bright in the KPMG Inter School Athletic Competition where 168 schools with about 6000 children participated. We won 9 medals against all odds. We walked away with the Best School Award again this year. This achievement has been covered very well by the media here.

The Parikrma Football team has been on a winning streak this year and had reached the Semi Finals of an important tournament. One of our boys got selected for the State Football team and has attended a football camp in Chennai. He should start playing for the State soon. This is indeed a great honour for us and speaks volumes about our approach and training. It is endearing to watch that our football team has now a fan following from other privileged schools. Many young football enthusiasts from quite elite schools enquired whether they would get admission into Parikrma! Apart from the public acknowledgement of our children's talent, these forums are also doing wonders to our children's self esteem and confidence.

We have hired an energetic drama teacher trained at the National School of Drama. This will hone some latent talent that exists in our school. This will also help our children with presentation skills and verbal expression.

NUTRITION

Breakfast, Lunch and a glass of malt everyday for our children continues without any changes. We have tried to create some variety in the meals by making some changes in the menu. We ran a training program for some of the caterers on hygiene and nutrition. It is important to note that all the caterers and their attendants are actually fathers of our children and have been facilitated by us to start up their catering enterprise. Initially we were their only clients but now they have acquired additional business on their own. Apart from bringing financial stability to these households, we are confident of the quality and the delivery of all the meals, because their own children also eat it too.

We have now signed an MOU with the Nutrition department of the University of Illinois, and we will be introducing soya granules and soya flour in our children's diet. We have hired a trained nutritionist who has earlier worked with WHO, to monitor this project called the Wishh School Meals Project in India. All our caterers have been trained specially for this project and this program will begin early 2007. We hope that with this introduction of soya in the meals our children will be healthier and have immunity to all the diseases they are exposed to in their environment.

HEALTHCARE

Physical

Two health camps and one dental camp were conducted in the school. All our children have been immunized against polio, tuberculosis, tetanus, cholera, typhoid and measles, mumps and rubella. Some children have been given the Hepatitis B shot but a few children will be given their shots next year.

Our partnership with the Ramaiah Hospital has worked well and they have given us subsidized rates for all the medical facilities. Six of our children have undergone minor operations and about eighty other children were treated for fractures and ailments. All the minor injuries and cough and colds were treated by our in-house doctor who takes a small monthly fee.

Mental

Our new psychiatrist has been working well with the children and the parents. She is seen around the school having one to one counseling sessions with the children. We have increased her scope of work to include counseling the teachers which she has agreed to do at no additional fee. We

find our teachers too sometimes are overworked and stressed and need counseling so that they can get back to work with renewed energy. We have been getting assistance from Dr Ashok of St John's Hospital and Dr Sekhar Seshadri of NIMHANS, both very eminent child psychologists. They have been conducting very high valued workshops for our teachers and children. We will be signing an MOU with St John's Hospital early 2007 so that we can partner in doing a case study on the impact of mental health care for poor children in schools.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

We had to take a hard decision to part ways with one of our experienced social workers because there were some issues related to integrity that was raised by some of our parents. We realize that we cannot take risks with the goodwill we have created in the community because of our attitude and hard work. It was also important to distance the organization from any individual controversy and give the message to the community that we mean serious business with absolute no vested interest. This departure however has set us back in one slum by a few months. We have now done a restructuring of the department, hired new staff and split responsibilities. This new structure seems to be working well. Close monitoring will continue for a few months.

The social workers are under pressure because of our popularity in the communities where they have to actually fend off the rush for admissions. They therefore need to be very thorough in the selection process. To ensure that the admissions is absolutely correct and fair we have established an Admission Committee comprised of some members in Resource Team that are involved in every step of the selection process. We have already started working on identifying students for the academic year 2007-08.

One of the challenges of this work is that although the slums that we are working with are widespread and we do not have as many social workers that we would ideally need, we cannot work with any volunteer here. We had about 37 international volunteers working with us for about 3 to 4 months and although they were keen to work in the slums we could not use them because of the language and cultural differences. We were however very fortunate to find a local student from a Management College who volunteered to work in the community for three months. He assisted our social workers in doing a systematic survey of all the new households that we would like to work with in 2007-08. We wish we could have more such volunteers coming our way.

We have conducted six parents meetings during this period and several small group meeting. Two mothers have been assisted to visit NIMHANS for

counseling as many psychological issues have emerged that are impacted their children's development in school. Many of our mothers are subjected to many years of battering and abuse which affects their parenting abilities. While we would like to continue this line of support to the families, we realize that most parents are not willing to give up their daily wage for counseling even all treatment is provided free by Parikrma. This is as arduous as our effort to take the alcoholic fathers for de-addiction labs. While alcoholism is rampant in the slums, getting our fathers to admit it is the most difficult task. While the fathers who have sobered continue to stay so, in this period we could take only one father for the de-addiction program and that too only because we managed to successfully conspire with the wife and children.

The last PTA we conducted had 100% attendance by the mothers. We are delighted to note that some fathers, especially of the older children are also coming in for the meetings. We have been honoring the proactive fathers publicly in our Annual Day and this seems to have encouraged some of the fathers in playing a more interested role.

We have done a few health camps and classes on hygiene and nutrition for all our parents in collaboration with the Ramaiah Hospital doctors. We have had some discussion with Ramaiah of launching a health card for all the parents that would entitle them to free health care.

Our NGO partner ACCEPTS continued to conduct HIV/AIDS awareness program for our parents conducted in the slums itself in community halls hired by us. We find the sessions become meaningful only if it is made interactive and gender selected.

The micro credit partner Ujjivan is expanding its activities in the slums and we hope that many of the parent community will benefit from it. This company is grateful to us for the initial support that we provided to them to bond with the community. They still continue to use our school for all the self help group meetings. As many of our mothers are these group leaders they use our facilities with a sense of ownership which is nice to observe.

We regret to announce that many of the youths that we selected this term for the vocational programs conducted by Unnati did not get selected because of eligibility factors. As we are working in the lowest economic category in the slums, we find the young adults here have not reached the school level that is required by Unnati. Anyone who has reached a certain academic level is already employed in some petty businesses. There is no point in pulling them out of their trades like plumbing, masonry etc. without giving guarantees of better jobs. We are keen to address the youths that

have just no hope getting a stable job. The CDS team now has the challenge of identifying training programs that could be applicable to youths who have not been to school at all. We however continue our search for suitable young people for the Unnati program by expanding our geographical base.

As we have just restructured our team and have hired two trained social workers, we will be focusing on forging new partnerships with other NGOs to increase the range of services that we can offer to our communities.

EVENTS

This term has been very eventful because of the variety of eminent visitors that have come to our schools. We have had Biddu, a famous musician (the composer of "Kungfu Fighting") who now lives in England bring his guitar to the school and spend a couple of hours singing for our children.

We also had Vijay Amritraj, the well known tennis expert and commentator visit our school. We had writer Simon Winchester who had just been knighted by the Queen share his colorful experiences with the children. Journalists like Chidu Rajghatta and Marcel Thoreau were also some of our visitors. We had a German MP and a Dutch political delegation visit our schools. We are delighted that they heard of us and showed interest to see our activities. It was very exciting for us to host a batch of students from Wharton Business School and Bapson College from US. Their articles about Parikrma in their Business Journal when back home made us feel good.

The Annual Day was celebrated with great aplomb in the Town Hall where children from all the four schools with their parents congregated. We invited Ashwini Nachappa, a well known athlete, as our Chief Guest and many CEOs of companies as Guests of Honor. Prizes for proficiency in academics, 100% attendance, and proactive parents were given away by the dignitaries. We have instituted a special trophy for an all rounder student in memory of Nikhil Rao, a well loved volunteer who died in a motorbike accident. This trophy was won by Lamsy, a student of Parikrma. Her impromptu speech in English in front of about 1000 people when receiving the trophy proved that it was well deserved.

We celebrated Adobe Day at Parikrma on November 25, 2006. We had many Adobe volunteers who came to school that day and conducted various activities that kept the children thrilled and engaged. We would want to establish an Adobe Day in our calendar to celebrate every year.

VOLUNTEERS

Parikrma seems to have been planted in the volunteering map with no effort of our own. We have on an average about 10 international volunteers working with us per month. We provide a house for a few volunteers in the Sahakaranagar. Every summer we have an average of 13 to 14 volunteers from the Glasgow University who come and stay with us for an average of three months. The volunteers work very hard as co teachers/ tutors in the classes and also assist the PE teachers in sports activities. Many of the volunteers also play with the children that come to us from the orphanages.

We are working with a number of volunteer agencies like I to I, GAAP, Gapguru. We have refused to work with agencies that ask for a fee to place volunteers.

We have many local students and corporate employees that work with on Saturdays. We welcome them as they become our link when we run the Half a Day program in their respective organizations. On an average we would have had about 50 international volunteers working with us for an average of three months and about 100 Indian volunteers that work in all the schools periodically.

Our best volunteer has been an employee from Adobe Canada called Blair Powell who has been coming for a couple of hours everytime he comes to India to teach our Senior classes lessons in History. He is a brilliant teacher and has become a favourite of all our children. We use him as a role model to most of our other corporate volunteers.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Our after school program at the 15 Government schools continue this year as well. We have hired 45 additional trained teachers for this program. We have a separate Project Director who comes with 35 years of experience as a Principal of many Government schools. The model we have adopted for this program seems to be working well and some of the workbooks we have developed are being demanded by other schools at a price. We hope that this year too we will prove to the government that these children can also excel with a little bit of attention. These children will be sitting for the Board Exam in March 07.

CHALLENGES

Our real challenge this year has been to bust all stereotypes and perceptions about what an NGO should be. Because of our studied difference in

approach we are often perceived as being confident and self sufficient. We know that many donors have shied away from us because they think that others are more “needy” than us. They haven’t yet been able to distinguish the difference between charity and development work. We are however grateful that many professional organizations have been able to see the difference and talk long term impacts with us.

With the growing numbers and activities in our program, it is becoming imperative for us to hire some experienced people who come with a price in the areas of finance and marketing. And yet there is never enough money to set aside for this function as most donors want low administrative costs. We need to look for donors who understand that funds need to be allocated for administration for efficient running of the organization. At the moment it is only Vivek and me who manages the marketing function together with overseeing other activities and I must say we are much stretched.

Just a few years ago our challenge was to achieve some degree of sustainability, but today we feel we have developed the skills to be sustainable with continued effort without any guarantees. Our real challenge today is to meet the demands of scaling up without comprising our quality and threat of burnout.

OPPORTUNITIES

As the Parikrma model is slowly maturing and showing results, we have been able to refine many of our policies. We are happy that our projections have not been off the mark. We believe that we are now poised to reach the next level of development work. We have opened an office in UK. This is just a representative office so that donors from UK can avail of the tax benefit. This seems to have picked up and funds are slowly coming in and there are operating expenses of the office. This is being run by volunteers in UK that we have worked with. We need to open similar office in US to avail of the same benefits.

To address the problem of scalability we have been in talks with some graduates of MIT who are willing to create a franchise document for the Parikrma model which would allow us to look at opening schools in other cities. Creation of the operating manual has already begun to some degree in-house.

THE WAY FORWARD

Our focus is to start working on the Hub School with the Junior College and Teachers Training Centre. Although preliminary talks have begun we have

not made any headway in acquiring land. This is where some additional help in project development would really help. We are looking at areas in Whitefield for this project. We need to connect with the government and builders in that area to get an inkling of land costs and availability of land for such projects.

We have commissioned a market research company to do an impact study of the Parikrma model in the communities. It will be completed by early 2007. We will be very happy to share the results of the study with Adobe because I must admit that it is our discussions with your organization that inspired us to do this study to consolidate our learning and find a way forward.