



Support A Child



OCTOBER 2008 ISSUE II SILICON VALLEY CHAPTER

FROM THE SUPPORT A CHILD TEAM

Greetings from the Asha for Education (AfE) Silicon Valley Support-A-Child (SAC) team.

The SAC programme is happy to announce that from the year 2009—2010 we will be supporting twenty higher education level students from the Reward Trust project.

AfE already supports Reward Trust for the last four years in other fields of education.

On the down side AfE has been having difficulty transferring funds to Ankur Vidya Mandir. Ankur had separated from its partner organisation Swadhar in 2006,

losing the use of Swadhar's FCRA account which is necessary for funds transfer. Since then Ankur has been unsuccessful in obtaining their own FCRA account making the transfer of funds from AfE very complicated. In the event Ankur is unable to obtain an FCRA account by the end of 2008—2009, AfE

will not be able to continue support from 2009—2010. We will do our best to put them in touch with other AfE chapters and funding sources so that students are not affected. This is unfortunate because Ankur is doing excellent work to aid underprivileged students in Pune.

sv-sac@ashanet.org

Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement — Karnataka



SVYM VidyaKiran has been a SAC project for one year.

The project started with just twenty one students but has doubled in size over the past year to forty. Another twenty students will be added during this year.

SVYM — VidyaKiran is located in Mysore, India and is targeted at economically constrained students aged fifteen to twenty two who have the desire to continue higher education after 10th standard. The programme provides academic tutoring, moral support, enthusiastic encouragement (a quality overlooked in our time) and

Neil Kadakia and Archana Sheth

financial assistance to students.

The students included in this project are exceptionally bright, though each of them has had domestic or financial troubles. SVYM — VidyaKiran works with students to overcome these hurdles and motivate them to excel in college enabling them to get placed in engineering, education, medicine or other prestigious, high-paying fields. We hope that after going through the SVYM — VidyaKiran programme the students will have a solid education and will become financially capable of providing for themselves and their families.

Because of the difficult lives many of the students face, it was initially very difficult to motivate some of the students to attend

the tutoring courses offered by SVYM — VidyaKiran. Many students felt very shy because their English was poor. Others became overwhelmed because they had never



Group discussion session at SVYM

received such focused academic assistance and were not sure if it would benefit them. However, the encouraging and motivated SVYM — VidyaKiran coordinators in Mysore changed all of this around by showing the students that they should not feel shy and by stressing the importance of Education. For example, when some of the students struggled to receive expected scores, the coordinators

took the time to understand where each individual student was struggling

and helped them understand the concepts needed. They arranged for electronic academic material to supplement classroom education. Over the year, SVYM — VidyaKiran has noticed a marked increase in attendance at some of the tutoring sessions and has also seen test scores rise. The students have excelled academically and have become more confident in themselves.

Centre for Development of Disadvantaged People — Tamil Nadu

S. Sethunarayanan



This year, the Centre for the Development of Disadvantaged People (CDDP) held the anniversary celebration for its seven schools at the Nedumbaram campus.

On July 12th, all 175 students from CDDP's seven schools were taken in a bus to Nedumbaram for a day of talent exchanges, various cultural and sporting activities and a sumptuous lunch!

Each school was given the task of putting together a cultural performance — dance, drama, or singing — where students could express their talents.

Sporting events were held as well — musical chairs, sprints, and frog races. Students competed in a spirit of camaraderie rather than competition, an idea reinforced when each student was given a prize to mark his or her participation in the events of the day. By having this chance to socialize with their counter-

parts from sister CDDP schools, students were able to feel a sense of community and encouragement for their academic endeavors.



At the anniversary celebrations

Mr. K. Jayaraman, a retired education specialist with the Indian Administrative Service presided over the event as chief guest. Several other guests and donors attended, one of whom presented the CDDP with a gift of three computers. The CDDP has

since trained the three top performing students from the 12th grade in the basic operation of computers. These students continue to master their new tool, while a grand day of rest was had by all at the annual anniversary celebration.

Basera-e-Tabassum — Jammu & Kashmir

Tillotama Shome



As our car stopped and the engine died, the children, one by one, ran out of the building to welcome us. They had never seen me before nor did they know that a stranger was expected. Yet, as if galvanized by a thirst for human contact each of the shy kids, embraced me in a hug and wished me 'Good morning!'. The tactile experience of being embraced by fifty two children, is something beyond description! I was overwhelmed to say the least as the hugs and kisses continued for a good ten minutes.

My first lesson - thirty seconds of interaction after

meeting someone new sets the foundation of a relationship for a lifetime. We are afraid to love at first sight because we are unsure of the others' intent and self-preservation kicks in. The children taught me to love unconditionally. Their childhood has been marred, violated by the senseless violence, loved ones tortured, gunned to death and daily life hijacked by curfew, gunshots, scarcity, displacements and lack of respect for the sanctity of life. How then do you embrace a stranger with such love, such openness and trust? How?

B-e-T, has created a home - not an orphanage - that has painstakingly nurtured the children with care so that the violence witnessed by these little ones has slowly

sublimated itself to a deep-felt humanity and a need to correct the wrongs done to them simply by loving another and then yet another. Suffering makes one cynical and hard when we are weak but is the only way to become more human if one has courage. B-e-T has uniquely given these children courage and love beside curricular education.

My second lesson - leadership at B-e-T is a stunning model of unflinching responsiveness to events and people around. Its founder Adhik Kadam, administrators Supriya and Salima are a motley crew who come from differing backgrounds and yet are beautifully in rhythm with each other and offer a refreshingly unique flavour of leadership.

Supriya, a TISS graduate, daily interfaces with army and militants, teaches the children English, makes rotis and chai in the kitchen,

ensures their safe passage to school everyday and unites with the children in Ramadan fasts.

Salima - well we never spoke much, she was invisible because of the speed at which she executed her responsibilities. I heard the most amazing story about her. A gas cylinder had burst in the kitchen and the fire was spreading. Salima swiftly ordered the children to evacuate. She went inside the burning room and switched off the regulator. She later said, in the most matter of fact way, "Its better for one to die than many getting hurt." Such prosaic thoughts fly around in B-e-T amidst the most incredibly volatile situations.

Adhik is at the helm of ensuring the funding, running of B-e-T and juggles between the head office in Pune and Kupwara. Yet even in his sleep he is constantly thinking of bettering

the lives of these children. Seeing him in action with the kids was a demonstration of a dialogic teacher who thrives on opening new spaces in the minds and hearts of the children. He transformed from a loving caretaker, to a jester, to a musician, to playing devils advocate, a confidante, and a parent with ease.

The children themselves take care of each other with instincts that are beyond maternal. Each child took care of those younger to them, without being asked to. A six-year old constantly carried her few-month old baby sister without once complaining of her tiring arms. They have fundamen-

tally redefined my notion of family and home.

I recollect the first morning in B-e-T - brushing my teeth in their bathroom with the usual nonchalance and pace of an upper middle class upbringing. Getting out of the bathroom, I was shocked to see seven little girls lined up patiently with face and legs contorted. But there was not a knock on the door to indicate their urgent and perhaps greater need to use that bathroom. I suppose when you have witnessed your loved ones mutilated and killed, your notion of love and patience takes on a new dimension. And the typical demands of childhood transform into a life of

unusual selfless discipline.

My conversations with the girls about their dreams was a revelation. Each of them have a clear picture of the kind of education, career they want to pursue and are unfazed by the reality of their situation. And yet their innocence was sharp enough to condemn the callousness of the privileged in Mumbai towards the slums that grew around them and did nothing to clean the city or reach out to those who had nothing.



Students from B-e-T on a trip to Pune

The fifty beautiful hearts that I had the privilege to work with have shaken me to the core and inspired in me a pro-active humanism that so easily takes on the dull patina of indifference and forgetfulness.

Sowbhagya Educational Trust — Tamil Nadu

Subashree Rajagopal



Sowbhagya Trust is happy to share that D. Naveena has secured employment with Meenakshi Krishnan Polytechnic College in Chennai, as a Lecturer, with a salary of Rs. 8000 per month. Naveena graduated with a degree in computer science and engineering in

June 2008. She has consistently been one of her college's top performers. Naveena is the second female student to graduate with an engineering degree from the trust. Naveena's family is from Neelankarai and her father works as a driver in the local area. Naveena finished her schooling and engineering degree through the Support A Child programme.

In addition to Naveena, five other students graduated with college degrees this June and all have found good employment.

This is a tough job market with companies either slowing or freezing their hiring in India. It is of great credit to the graduates that they have all secured employment in this tough environment.

The younger students of the trust are doing well, in the academic and extra curricular areas. The students cele-

brate "Student's Day" every month. They conduct debates, put up skits, write poetry, make speeches and create models of art and science. Discussion topics range from Mahatma Gandhi to nuclear power, plastic bags and "What I would do if I were President". The students also enjoyed their Sports Day – a day filled with great fun and races such as lemon in a spoon and sack races. Overall, it has been a good year for Sowbhagya Educational Trust.

Tomorrow's Foundation Stars (TF Stars) — West Bengal

Venkata Pingali



TF Stars is a partnership between Asha for Education and Tomorrow's Foundation — a non-profit organization in

Kolkata providing support for education to children living in the Kallighat temple area of Kolkata.

Various chapters of Asha for Education were involved since 1995. The present sponsor-

ship programme, since October 2006, is an initiative with the Silicon Valley chapter.

We are currently supporting fifty students at grades III and above including fifteen students at the higher education level. The project is progressing satisfactorily.

We are happy to report that two students successfully graduated from a bachelors programme at the end of 2007—2008. We expect eight more next year. Three students have dropped out of the programme. Out of three, one left after finding a job to support himself, and two due to other family-

related reasons. The circumstances and environment of the students are often beyond the control of TF and Asha. We try our best to keep sponsors informed of developments and select students in such a way that it balances our desire for lesser churn with the needs of on the ground. It is often the case that likely dropouts are those whose needs are the greatest.

Understanding the context

Changing faces

Having received the latest set of profile photographs, we had a tough time matching them up with the previous sets. The previous photographs were two to four years older in some cases. Yet another reminder that children grow up fast and how time flies!

is crucial to appreciate the discontinuation, highly variable performance and other issues. Poverty is the common denominator that makes every other problem much harder. Statistics of the community are revealing — 74% of the students

face domestic violence and risky living environment in addition to poor income levels, 30% of the students' families have single or no biological parents, 22% do not have stable shelter due to financial, social or other reasons,

20% live in physically or otherwise risky environment such as red light district and sewage canals. Families of 22% of the students have members with major illnesses that drain the limited available resources. On the average, each student has to deal with at least two other major issues taking away resources and attention from academics.

In addition to basic education, our resources enable crucial coping mechanism in the form of stable and trusted environment and individual. Specific services such as crisis care, counseling and guidance for the students are invaluable. Although there is much to be done, this sponsorship programme that enables these services is important in its own right. Thank you on behalf of Asha for Education and its many volunteers!

