

Urmul Jyoti Update (March 10, 2003)

(As part of WAH-2002 Asha is funding two residential camps for a total of 240 adolescent girls in Nokha, Rajasthan)

The first Asha-sponsored camp started on March 8th (Woman's Day). The location of the camp is a rest-house near the dharamshala which was initially intended to be residence for all the girls. The owners of the dharamshala are constructing an addition to it and it may be available at a later date for this camp. There will be a total of 6 teachers (4 teachers are newly trained and 2 are experienced teachers). The camp will run for exactly 210 days.

Separately, Urmul Jyoti had organized their annual "balika mela" for all the alum girls of their previous from February 21-February 25, 2003. About 600 girls attended this and many came from far away villages and some even by themselves. The agenda of the meeting was manifold and the girls had a chance to discuss/learn a number of aspects of their lives. I was told that 47% of all the girls that have passed through the 6-camps have continued studying beyond the 6th grade.

Working with and Learning from this initiative

1. We don't want Asha's relationship with Urmul Jyoti a solely monetary one and one-time in nature. Urmul Jyoti has agreed to host a monthly call to talk with the girls and teachers. Also, this is supposed to address the concern some had raised during WAH discussions that Asha should be working with (learning from) and not simply writing a check to the project as 1-time funding. This monthly call will take place every 9th of Month at 9AM IST (please let me know if you are interested in attending this call and I will let you know the details once the call is organized). We hope we can learn about the process, their challenges, and more importantly, in what way is this helping the adolescent girls.
2. I am also inviting other chapters and members of Asha community to inform their respective projects about this residential camp. And if appropriate even ask other projects to attend the camp and see the workings of this Asha-supported camp. (Ajay Dalmia is planning to provide the details of this project to another WAH-supported project in Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan). It would be immensely valuable if other organizations can see it and even replicate parts of it if they find appropriate. Chapters should consider funding the travel expenses of people who they think it may be worthwhile for.

Please let me know if you have any comments/questions.

Raj

Urmul Jyoti Update (April 8, 2003)

Background: Asha is supporting a 6-month residential camp for 124 girls from 31 villages in Nokha, Rajasthan through WAH funds. This camp will last through September and the next one will commence in October.

Tonight we spoke to 1 teacher and 2 students from the first of the two residential camps sponsored by Asha. It was heartening and great to talk to these young ladies who seem to be engrossed in the workings of the camp.

Chitra, Teacher

She is originally from Bikaner and is a teacher at the camp along with her sister. This is the second camp where she has taught. Currently, she is teaching a group of 28 girls (this group is ranked the poorest in studies and hence the most challenging group to teach). She sounded very upbeat and seems to be enjoying her experience at the camp. When asked what things could be done to improve the camp, she answered that hands-on training like handicraft would be beneficial to the girls. But she also mentioned that given the time constraints of the 6-month camp it is hard to squeeze in additional programs. She suggested adding an additional month of training at the end of the camp with this in mind. Chitra also recommended sending the girls for sports events at the district, state, national level to increase their level of confidence.

Baby

Baby is an enthusiastic and talkative young lady of 14 years who seems to be having a blast this camp. She is from a village 15 miles away from the camp. She has already made many friends and enjoys spending time and talking with them (even after lights are out at night!). She has 6 sisters and 4 brothers. Two of her younger sisters have already gone through a similar camp and one of them is studying in 6th grade in the local government school. Baby asked us what time it was in the US and she sounded a little surprised when we told her it was 9pm here.

Dhanni

Dhanni was quieter of the two girls. She is also 14 years of age and is from a village 9 miles away. She has 3 sisters and 1 brother. No one in her family has been to school although she studied till 2nd grade before she had to drop out and work in the fields. Like Baby, she has made many friends and does not miss home or her family now. Dhanni wants to do household work when she grows up and says that when she has kids she will send them to school. When we asked her something she did not know or understand she would whisper to Chitra, who would translate it to her local dialect.

Preeti & Raj