



asha kiran

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter



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Miles for Smiles

"Miles for Smiles" is a brand new Asha Seattle initiative - this is a fundraising event where volunteers can raise funds by participating in marathon or walkathon events organized in and around Seattle. Similar fund-raising events are being successfully hosted by other Asha chapters, notably "Harbingers of Hope" by Asha California and Asha New Jersey. We anticipate Miles for Smiles to become one of the forerunning fundraisers for Asha-Seattle in the coming years. The tremendous commitment of the volunteers, in terms of their effort and time involved, provides a powerful message to increase awareness about Asha and its activities in India. This article is all about the runners' experience during the training schedules in Seattle, and information about prospective runners.

A good news for everyone who wants to run under Asha's banner is that Asha provides free training for all runners through Run Chuckit, under the supervision of coach Chuck who has had tremendous experience in cross-country as well as sprint training. The organizational responsibilities, training schedules and publicity effort is being coordinated by Binay working together with a host of other Asha volunteers. We have about thirty committed runners for this year,

running and walking marathons and half-marathons in Seattle and Portland. Runners talk about themselves, their motivations, their commitments and their requests on the Miles for Smiles website at <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/marathon/runners.php>.

Not only do we have seasoned runners like Sethu but novice runners like Swati and Govind working it out this year. Sethu, who has been running for the past ten years, "initially fueled by my desire to eat chocolate and stay healthy at the same time, but later fueled by causes such as the Boys and Girls Club of California, and now Asha". We also have newcomers like Govind, who says of his early training, "When I started training six months ago, I couldn't even run two miles. But only two months of training later, I built enough confidence and ability to commit to running a full 26 miles for Asha". If you're a new runner and still wondering about taking part in the event, be sure to read what Govind and other new runners have to say about their training experiences and personal rewards at <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/marathon/runners.php>.

Please do take some time to read what our runners have to say - each brings his or her own background,

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Many companies have an annual giving campaign. This is generally a yearly event when employees of a company pledge money to their favorite charitable organizations. For example, Microsoft & other companies in the greater Seattle area have their giving campaign in the month of October this year. A variety of events are organized during this time, including non-profit agency fairs and information sessions. Asha Seattle's annual commitment for next year (2005) is over \$375,000 supporting more than 40 partners all across India. Our work requires serious and recurring commitment over the years. Company giving campaigns are our main source of fund-raising and we hope you would consider us during your company's giving campaign. We are looking forward to your continued support.



Asha runners relaxing after a half-marathon training run

strongly encourage you to pick your favorite runner or walker today, and boost their morale and promote our cause by sponsoring one or more of their miles. Each runner's page has contribution links alongside where you can make online donations.

This year proceeds from Miles for Smiles will benefit two projects -

AVEHI Abacus and MICDA

(<http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php>). AVEHI, Audio Visual Education Resource Center, based in Mumbai, is a resource center for development and dissemination of educational material that will contribute to the cause of education in its broadest sense. AVEHI works within the existing educational structure to make the schooling experience more relevant, meaningful and enjoyable for children as well as teachers. On the other side of the spectrum is MICDA, a community-based intervention program dedicated to eliminating the "Mathamma" practice prevalent in the Madiga community in Chittor District of Andhra Pradesh. Mathammas are young girl

children who have been dedicated to Goddess Mathamma due to ignorant superstitious and religious beliefs. MICDA helps them through comprehensive community and pediatric health care programs, education of Mathammas and awareness campaigns.

Sethu echoes most runners' sentiments when he says, "I am really looking forward to the Asha marathon because to me getting an education is an endurance event like the Marathon. Every step of the way I am going to be thinking about the kids who are going to benefit from it. It is going to make it worthwhile." On behalf of the entire Miles for Smiles team, we look forward to your support toward our goal of raising \$50K for AVEHI Abacus and MICDA, and to your participation in Miles for Smiles in the years to come!

For more information about this event, please visit <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/marathon>.

If you have questions or comments about this story or the event, please contact Binay Pathak at bk_pathak@yahoo.com.

**Miles
for Smiles**
volunteers will run as
part of the Seattle Marathon
on Nov. 28th 2004 or
Portland Marathon
on Oct. 3rd 2004.

**The Day My
God Died**

Presented by UW Women's Center and Asha for Education
Saturday, October 23, 6:30 - 9 p.m. Architecture Building, Rm 147

The traumatic experience of young Nepali and Indian children abducted and subsequently sold into the "lucrative" child-sex trade is documented in The Day My God Died. It explores the prevalent child sex trade through the lives of its victims, their stories of lost hopes and dreams. The documentary retraces the experiences of five young girls who have escaped from what has become the fastest growing black market in the world, while simultaneously exploring the issues that these young girls face as they prepare to die of AIDS. This film, by Andrew Levine, is disturbing and painful, but leaves us off with a sense of awareness and hope.

Call to register 206-685-1090.

School with a Difference

Champa Mahila Society (CMS) is a self-help organization working among the financially underprivileged community in Basanti in the Sundarban area of West Bengal. The association between Asha Seattle and CMS goes back a long way. The basic charter of CMS encompasses education at all levels, children or adult; presently, it runs fifteen Pre-primary schools, along with a boys' home, and has been successful in instilling awareness about education throughout the region. Besides education, it has helped them with setting up various income generating schemes like kitchen garden, animal husbandry, micro-credit savings, self-help groups among the village women to strengthen their economic condition.

A key problem of Sundarban is poverty fueled by lack of electricity, agricultural land and proper infrastructure

CHAMPA MAHILA

Monorama is a typical Bengali teenager with a difference. Her sister's class mate, Khadija, as well as friends, Astami and Tara are already married. Most of them were in schools before dropping out due to family pressure. Monorama's story is somewhat different. She lives with her mother at her maternal uncle's place. Most of the times, she, along with her mother and grandmother, eke out a living by picking "saag" (spinach) growing in the wild and selling it in the local market. Sometimes, things get so desperate that they have to resort to begging. Monorama used to be in school but sheer poverty made her drop out. Her grandmother, in her effort to seek help for the girl, landed up at the door of Champa Mahila Society (CMS) one day and soon after that, things began to change.

CMS is a self-help organization based in the Shibganj village of Basanti block. For twenty long years, they have been working with destitute, tortured and widowed women helping them on their way towards self-sufficiency. With 87 dropouts girls like Ajmira, Sarjina, Montara and Najimara hailing mainly from poor families, CMS has started a school, Sarada Balika Bidyamandir.

On 12 Aug, 2002, the school started with only 14 girls in attendance - with girls like Monorama for whom getting an education and achieving self-reliance is a higher priority than getting married off. Initially, the school had a very humble beginning starting under a temporary shade manned by teachers from various local schools; however, now it has grown into a brick building housing the different classes. Basanti Das, who has been with the school from the beginning, said, "The girls remembered a lot even though they had left school so abruptly. So the classes were created

creating a vicious cycle of lack of education and poverty. Girl children are the ones worst affected as female education is still at bottom of their social priorities leading to high drop-out rates of these girls.

To counter this, in 2002, CMS has opened a special school for drop-out girls of various ages, Sarada Balika Bidyamandir. This school specializes in formal education as well as vocational training. The students are provided with lunch, books, garments and medical care in the training center. The full time staff look after their education, health, nutrition and over all physical and mental development.

Sarada Balika Bidyamandir was at the center of attraction when it was projected by Ananda Bazar Patrika, the largest-selling Bengali newspaper. The following article is an English adaptation of the article

based on the knowledge they had already acquired before dropping out. They had retained few books to remember alphabets and some that they simply liked to read and thus we could encourage them to restart the learning process by going back to these books."

Why are these girls, who had left school once, coming back? Porijan Naskar, a student, opened up. "Education is free here. We get books, pencils & dress - everything from school, also tiffin. We are learning different crafts & selling agarbatti's door to door. That's why we like studying." CMS's main figure Amol Nayak, also a teacher in this school, said, "These girls came up through CMS's Self Help program. Anyone who is between 6 and 18 years of age and is willing to study won't be turned away. At present, there are efforts to get the nursery section of the school going. "

The students comprise of dropout girls from as far as Dhashbhanga, Dattarchak, 2 No. Ranigar, Chandkhali, and Ballartop in Basanti block. Though presently the school has classes from Nursery to Standard V, the teachers hope that the school will grow step by step. The school is manned by five teachers now. Meanwhile a handful of the students have got certificates for clearing class VI through the local Shibganj Primary school. This program of bringing the drop-out girls back into the mainstream education is being sponsored by Asha for Education

Habiba, Archana & others are learning about the environment, vocations, songs, dance, "bratachari", and drawing along with other school subjects. Last winter, they went to Alipur Zoo & Museum in Kolkata with their teachers. The girls are happy and what does this make the parents think? "No more wedding. Let them grow like their teachers" - said

Asha for Education
23608 NE 45th place
Redmond, WA 98053



Return Service Requested



Contribution Slip

I am enclosing:

50\$ 100\$ 150\$

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email: _____

Please make your checks payable to 'Asha for Education'.
You can mail your contribution to:

Asha for Education
23608 NE 45th place
Redmond, WA 98053

100% of your contributions go towards Asha's
projects in India. Your contributions are Tax deductible.
Suggestions: _____



Would you like to volunteer with us?
Join us at our monthly meetings in the Lake Washington
School District Administration Building near the
Redmond Town Center. Our next meeting and venue are
on <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/min/meetings.html>
Our meetings are open to everyone.
Please do try and come.

Email: asha-seattle-info@yahoogroups.com
Internet: <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle>

Change of address?
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