

Asha for Education
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Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

VOLUME 11 - ISSUE 2
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editorial

Here is another edition of Asha Kiran. This time around, we feature articles on two focus groups within Asha Seattle: the tsunami relief group and the Bhopal awareness group. Both of these groups have been making strides in their own ways; we at Asha Seattle have always believed that a significant socio-economic change can be brought about in India not only by educating the underprivileged but also by spreading awareness and contributing to peoples' movements like the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. These initiatives enable us to get a wider understanding of the problems facing social development. This has led us to work with diverse project partners in India to ensure and also better the prevalent living conditions by

providing health care, livelihood provisions and education. We have several upcoming events focusing on the anniversary of the Bhopal tragedy (please see the accompanying article). In addition, we are looking for volunteers interested in coordinating as well as participating in various AA marathons for Asha. Thanks to the donors in the annual "Giving" campaigns of different organizations as well as individual donors who have been supporting our cause/s. Again, thanks to everyone for your continued support and encouragement.

-Asha Seattle team

Sambhavna Clinic: Bringing hope to the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy

"It was as though our lungs were on fire. We started running and I had to pry my eyes open to see. I saw mothers running and leaving their children behind, people coughing up blood", lamented a survivor recalling that fateful night of December 3rd, 1984, in Bhopal. The gas leak from the Union Carbide chemical company wiped out thousands of people instantaneously and many more survived with recurrent lifelong medical problems. However, even after 10 years, very little has been done for the victims of the greatest industrial tragedy ever. The effects of the tragedy have continued to haunt them as they seek the responsible people to be brought to justice.

In Bhopal, the people living in and around the factory are suffering from various chronic illnesses like menstrual problems, giddiness, abdominal pain, birth deformities etc. as fallout of that fateful accident. To add to the problems, the Union Carbide Chemical Company left Bhopal without cleaning its industrial wastes which then seeped into the ground contaminating the groundwater. "You can imagine the health of people who begin life with poisoned milk," said Ms. Rashida Bee. She is an activist whose stellar work in raising awareness about the plight of the Bhopal gas tragedy victims has been recognized by conferring the Goldman Environmental prize. Health care for the sufferers are not only expensive, but also problematic as without knowing the exact formula of the toxic materials present during the gas leak, doctors find it difficult to come up with exact antidotes. The Sambhavna clinic attempts to provide a ray of hope for the sufferers of Bhopal. This free clinic adopts a holistic medical approach by combining allopathy, ayurveda and yoga to provide relief to the patients, a majority of whom are women. Since September 1996, it has offered healthcare facilities to over 9000 chronically ill survivors of the severely-affected communities. The clinic is run by the Sambhavna Trust with Dr. P. M. Bhargava, Chandana Chakrabarti, Madhu Kishwar, Padma Prakash, Mira Sadgopal, Satinath Sarangi and Dr. H. H. Trivedi as trustees. It primarily runs



on individual donations collected from all over the world. In 2003, Asha-Seattle had sponsored the publication of a self-help health booklet to be used by the patients themselves. The main aim of the book had been to help the patients identify their own ailments and take recourse to easily accessible home remedies. To know more about this, please visit <http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=342>

As the people of Bhopal demand adequate compensation, access to clean drinking water and toxin-free environment even so long after the accident, organizations and groups around the world are coming together to raise awareness about the rights of these neglected people. As time rolls on, the resolve and the courage of the people of Bhopal to fight for justice has only been strengthened. Their demands are basic and are something that has to be ensured for every living being on this earth. For more information on the Bhopal gas tragedy, dubbed the "Hiroshima of the chemical industry", please visit <http://www.bhopal.org> and <http://www.studentsforbhopal.org>

Asha Seattle has been attempting to empower the community and provide the survivors with healthcare by working alongside Sambhavna. **In an effort to increase awareness about the Bhopal tragedy, Asha-Seattle along with Amnesty International and Tasveer is hosting a photo exhibition at the Art/Not Gallery (2045 Westlake Ave, Seattle) from April 9th to May 5th.** The exhibition features the work of Raghu Rai who has captured the plight of the people of Bhopal just after the gas disaster. In addition, there are recent photographs by Maude Dorr who features the present condition



of the factory and the spirit of the people of Bhopal.

Along with the photo exhibition, there will be other special events to commemorate this tragedy (see Box on next page for details).

For more information, please visit: <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/bhopalexhibit/>

As they say in Bhopal- "Janta ki chala paltanya Hill lai lai Jagjoor duniya" [The people's power can shake any brutality in this world] (Cont. on page 2)

asha contribution slip

~ I am enclosing: \$25 \$50 \$100

~ I would like to make a quarterly contribution of \$_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

email: _____

Please make your checks payable to 'asha for education'.

You can mail your contribution to:
Asha for Education
PO Box 2407
Redmond, WA 98073-2407

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION

All are welcome to join us at our bi-monthly meetings. For information, please go to www.ashanet.org/seattle/resources/meetings/

Jan 6- Stevens Court, UW
Jan 19 - Microsoft Campus
Feb 3 - Stevens Court, UW
Feb 16 - Redmond Library
Mar 3 - Stevens Court, UW
Mar 16- Redmond Library

For specific requests and queries, please contact us at
Email: seattle@ashanet.org
Phone: 425 890 8515

Donations are welcome, and will go a long way in changing many lives in India.

Save some paper! Prefer to receive your newsletter by email?
Send an email to asha-seattle-info@yahoogroups.com

2004 SEATTLE MARATHON

Vibhavaree Gargeya is an active Asha volunteer who has run for Asha Seattle in the 2004 Seattle marathon. Starting from being a novice runner, as she was training for this big event and literally taking the "test of fire", she penned her experience in this journal-styled entry. She plans to run once again and if you'd like to join her (and a score of others), do mail Binay at bk_pathak@yahoo.com.

4.2 miles. That's the distance between work and home. I used to run/walk it semi-regularly. Run / walk? What's that? I'd run for a bit, stop, then walk,

and run again. In the summer of 2004, under peer pressure, I started to train for the Seattle Half marathon (13.1 miles), as a fund raiser for Asha-Seattle. I joined the group that Asha-Seattle was working with – Chuck's training group (www.runchuckit.com) who provided me useful tips and impetus to keep the training sessions going.

4 miles. My first landmark run: the groups first long run by Lake Washington. Would I be able to do it? Chuck said – take it slow; run at your pace, and you can run a while. That's what I did. Out two miles, and back two. So, I ran 4 miles! All those times, while running home from work when I felt I had to stop and walk, proved to be in my head!

6 miles. Next weekend, again, by Lake Washington. What a great feeling of accomplishment it was to finish that one. And, I felt like I could have kept going.

8 miles. By Lake Washington. 4 miles out, 4 miles back. Around mile 7, my right calf started hurting. I mused why I was doing this, and that thought actually kept me going. I never thought I could ever run 8 miles in my life at a stretch!

10 miles. My travels that fall took me to Bangalore, where I grew up. Where should I do 10 miles in Bangalore? Friends told me that there was now a lovely path around Sankey tank, a beautiful artificial lake near Malleswaram. Going around once measured out to 1.5 kilometers. Perfect! I would do 11 rounds around it. I wanted to run early in the morning, before it got hot. Ken, my husband, thought that someone should go with me, but he wanted to sleep in. What a dilemma! Clever that he is, he suggested, "Why don't you make this a father/daughter thing?" A very sweet suggestion; I knew my father would come with me, just for the asking.

So, off we went, Appa and me. The path around Sankey Tank was crowded with Bangaloreans getting their morning exercise. Most were walking, few running. I was the only woman in running shorts. Eyes were on me, but I am 34. I'd learned to ignore those a long time ago. Round 1--The path lived up to expectations. Bangalore Mahanagara Palike had really done a beautiful job. Lovely gardens, shady areas with nice trees, sunny areas, a platform off the path for stretches; there were even restrooms. All rather unbelievable. Especially as, when they drained the tank in preparation for the path, everyone was convinced it was in preparation for some site construction. Round 2--I saw my father on the path! Good. He was getting into it too. Round 3 -- "Close your mouth." Advice from someone walking in the other direction. "Mind your own business ", I wanted to say aloud. Round 4--My father again. Round 5--A man in a dhoti walking the other way raised his hand and said "sabash" ("good job"). I smiled and waved in return. It was a nice encouragement. Round 6-- "Sabash" again. The man in the dhoti; I liked him.

More than halfway done! I switched directions and started running counter clockwise around the tank. Round 7--A middle-aged woman in a blue saree, jogging. She had her pallu wrapped around her, and was holding it with her left hand. I smiled what I thought was an encouraging smile at her. Round 8-- now had an aching right calf, a pain

in my left hip and right ankle. But, I had to keep going. The woman in the blue saree, again. But she was walking. "Oh no, why did you stop?" I wondered. Round 9--I thought maybe if I tried to speed up, this would end sooner. So, I went faster. Big mistake. It sapped what little energy I had left. By now most people were at work. The crowds had thinned. Round 10--"How many?", my father, sitting on a bench asked. "Tenth one", I said. The pride in his face kept me going. Round 11--The last one. The most difficult one. "So, you've done one round and come, is it?", a woman sweeping the now empty path called out to me. "No", I replied, "I have done 10". Her jaw dropped. She covered her mouth and said, "You poor thing". As if this was a punishment. Her expression was worth every bit of effort. I saw my father walking toward me. And, I was done! My timing was terrible, but I did it. 10miles!!

I thanked Mr. Sankey for creating Sankey Tank. I thought about people like that--people who leave something behind that is enjoyed by generations. Is Asha's work like that? Will it impact generations? I thought so. But, I was thinking more about breakfast--which I enjoyed very much, with my father. A rare treat, since we live half a world apart.

6 miles. Back down to 6 miles, next weekend. Ken and I ran this in Machohalli village, rural Bangalore, on the road to Bapagram school, founded by my grandmother and run by my aunt. A few village children joined us. "Why are you doing this, auntie? Are you going to a run a race?." I explained that I was running it to raise money for schools like Bapagram. It felt good to tell them that. To let them know that in some way, there were all these people who cared about them.

12 miles. We were in Mumbai, next. Where exactly would I run 12 miles in Mumbai? After much debate, I finally went with my uncle's suggestion of running on the beach. I looked at the Eicher map of Mumbai. From the Godrej bungalow on Juhu beach, down south to Searock Sheraton and back was about 12 miles. The only problem was, about halfway down, near Sarasvat colony, there was a nala (stream) flowing into the sea. I was not sure if I would be able to cross this.

I woke up early, the next day and walked down to the beach. Again, a woman in running shorts seemed to be a novelty. The beach was crowded with exercisers. Okay, I would just be one of them. Good. I started with a bit of trepidation. Then, I saw a man running. He looked like he was doing a distance run. I made him my friend, mentally, and took off behind him. I hoped he was running as far as I was.

There is a meditative state that I had started to reach, sometimes, while running. That morning, it came to me easily. My thoughts withdrew and soon, I was alone, even among the masses. There was the beach, the sea, my feet on the ground, heads bobbing around me, and very little else.

My friend, the potential distance-runner stopped. No matter. I thanked him (mentally) for going a short distance with me. Life is like that. Some people accompany you for a little while, and some go the distance with you. Regardless, you never know whom you're helping, inspiring or supporting.

I was nearing Sarasvat colony. Unlike up to this point, there was trash everywhere; there was no beach cleanup. I was leaving the crowd of exercisers behind. Instead, the beach was full of men doing their morning business. I ran through this mess. I almost turned around, but was not ready to give up my goal of running to Searock Sheraton just yet. I reached the nala I had seen on the map. It turned out to be sewage water flowing into the sea. I saw a man crossing it. He simply entered the water and walked across. This was more than I was willing to do. I turned around and ran back through the morning squatters and the human excrement. "How can they allow themselves to live like this?", I thought. "How can WE allow a situation where thousands are forced to migrate to the city in search of a meager living, and are faced with no infrastructure to support them?" My little marathon effort suddenly seemed so small. I ran back to Godrej bungalow. I would simply do the roundtrip from Godrej Bungalow to

Sarasvat colony twice to make up my 12 miles. It was turning out to be a beautiful run, all the same. The sea was calm. I saw several planes flying overhead, taking off from the Airport, flying out over the Arabian Sea to lands far beyond. It was on one of those planes that I left home 15 years ago, very sad to be leaving, but full of anticipation. I wondered what adventures awaited the people in those planes flying over the sea. I was getting close to being done. As usual the last section was the toughest. I finished. I slowly walked back to my uncle and aunt's house. I was ready.

13.1 miles. November 28th, 2004. The day of the Seattle Marathon dawned clear, but cold. Close to 12,000 people ran that day. I had my Asha shirt proudly on my back. My right shoe was stained red, from mud, when I ran into a puddle in Machohalli. My shoes carried the sands of Mumbai. There was music. There were stops for water. Toward mile 10, I started to tire. My hands

were painfully cold. Suddenly, two familiar faces in the crowd--Asha volunteers who had come to cheer us. It was a boost. I wondered at the volunteers doing the full marathon (26.2mi.). 2 hours, 28 minutes – I finished.

The donations and support that poured in was heartwarming. I knew how hard my friends and family worked for their money. It increased my resolution as a volunteer, to make sure that every dollar is spent in the best manner possible. When will we succeed in our goal of providing access to quality education to all young Indians? I do not know. But as long as we keep trying, working and accomplishing; reaching the small goals along the way, we will get there.

4.2 miles. That's the distance from work to home. I was back at work, running home in the evening. Would I be able to run this old route, or would the familiarity bring back old mental blocks? I started out, and soon, I was home. It was a breeze.

(Cont. from page 1)

Asha Seattle Commemorates the BHOHAL/UNION CARBIDE TRAGEDY

All events are free and open to the public at the Art/Not Gallery
Address: 2045 Westlake Ave., Seattle

Saturday, April 9 - Opening Reception, 7-10pm

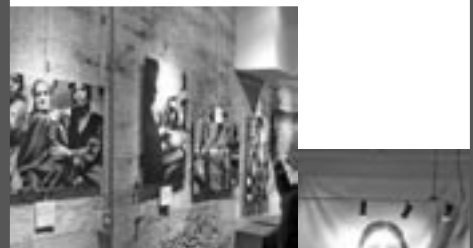
Friday, April 22 - "Reflections on a Just Earth Day", Larry Ebersole & other poets read their work about Bhopal. Included will be music and more, 7 -9pm

Saturday, April 23 - Film Screening of "Bhopal: A Search for Justice." Producer and Bhopal native Nadeem Uddin will be present for Q&A, 2pm onwards

Saturday, April 30 - Film Screening of "One Night in Bhopal" by Steven Condie and the BBC. Followed by a talk by KumKum Modwel, former Medical officer at Union- Carbide who resigned before the gas tragedy voicing concerns over safety issues at the plant, 7pm onwards.

If you miss the exhibit from April 9 - May 5 at Art/NOT Gallery, you can still catch it at the University of Washington's Suzzallo Library from **May 9 - May 13**.

Donations gladly accepted.



Snippets from the Bhopal photo exhibition held at the Art/Not Gallery.



A dreadful end to 2004 - a killer tsunami wipes out many villages and takes its toll on thousands of people living near the shore. This natural deluge was followed by an equally strong one – the deluge of love, compassion and caring for the victims from all corners of the world. Rarely has the world responded so rapidly and overpoweringly. In such times of suffering and need, the least one could do is help!! Asha Seattle volunteers grouped to form a team with the primary objective of coordinating relief efforts and aid in effectively channelizing support to various organizations working towards immediate and long-term sustenance efforts in the affected areas. The idea is not only to ensure speedy relief but also fast and relevant relief to the neediest. Asha Seattle has identified individuals and groups who are local to the area - being very sensitive and aware of the local culture, conditions and needs. We are supporting these groups in both monetarily and non monetarily. Wherever possible, we have tried to coordinate our relief effort plans with local groups or the Government so that we don't duplicate efforts and also to ensure that the relief and compensation reaches the genuinely-affected persons.

Here is a brief summary of our ongoing relief efforts with partner groups. For a complete listing of our Tsunami rehabilitation efforts, please visit <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/tsunamiirelief.php>

Anugriha has been working in Vellapallam village and our joint rehabilitation efforts focus on providing livelihood options for the affected families. The village primarily inhabited by fishermen, was once prosperous with over 85 boats and all them were damaged by the Tsunami. On top of that, these fishermen keep their savings in small boxes in their homes which were all washed away by the

Tsunami. The project focused on their household needs, childhood support, and water needs. The rehabilitation also include a children's activity center which would help restore some normalcy in their lives and assist them to bring them out of their depression.

Suyam Charitable Trust operating in Akkarapettai Panchayat, Chennai has been working with local youths to reconstruct schools affected by the Tsunami. We supported the rebuilding of a nursery and primary school which were partially destroyed and all furniture (tables, chairs, desks, etc.) washed away by the tsunami.

Rejuvenate India Movement (RIM) is a network of committed NGOs and individuals working together to promote and strengthen self-reliant communities by catalyzing mass movement through people's participation in India. We have partnered with them to support cash-for-work program that ploughs up the farming lands that have become saline due to the encroachment of the sea-water. Following an extensive assessment, 1562 acres were ploughed in Manickapangu, Veppanchery and Kumarakudi villages.

Swajyot, an Andaman and Nicobar based NGO, had extensively surveyed twelve Nicobar villages which were affected by the Tsunami. These villages have been either totally submerged or have become inaccessible due to the Tsunami. The villagers who survived the Tsunami have been relocated to shelters in the Campbell Bay area. To mitigate the urgent need for safe drinking water, we have supported them in the construction of dug wells. We are also reviewing other aspects of supporting their efforts viz., construction of roofing for shelters and balwadis, providing livelihood support to the affected families.

Thank you all for supporting our initiatives!!

CONTRIBUTE TO TSUNAMI RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

Asha Seattle has been deeply involved in the relief operations in the Tsunami-affected areas in India. We have been keeping in constant touch with our partners in India who have already been working in the affected areas. Our total target for the rehabilitation efforts is \$200K. We look forward to your continued support.

Please make a generous donation to help rebuild their lives--Help us reach out to the survivors

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to contact our Tsunami team volunteers (Vani/Sunil/Rahul) at seattle@ashanet.org.

Vani Subramanian has been a volunteer with ASHA since October. She has been coordinating some of the Tsunami relief projects and more recently with the planning of events around the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. She is an Electrical Engineer working in Redmond. You can contact her at vani.sud@gmail.com