



Asha Kiran

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

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Here we are with another edition of Asha Kiran. We have some happy news to share with you; five cycling enthusiasts have completed the STP (Seattle to Portland) biking event on behalf of Asha. Dubbed, "Wheels of Change" (please see website for

We have our flagship fund-raising event, AllGoRhythms scheduled in October and we hope to see you dancing away the night to some foot-tapping Bollywood music. For more such event announcements, do check the postings on our website from time to time.



Asha Bikers at Portland after completing the STP 2005 event. For more information, please visit <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/stp/>

details), the event has raised \$6K in donations till now. A big hand to all five, Vaibhav (who was in charge of "who, what, where, when, how"), Ravi (our "hot wheels", finishing in 12hr 30min), Leonard, Srinivas and Prashant.

We have a couple of fund raiser events coming up; the most important being the Seattle Marathon 2005. We do have an Asha team ("Miles for Smiles" comprising of Tarun, Ashita and Rutuja) working on the logistics of this event. Last year, the collective contributions to the runners topped \$23K and was dedicated to two of our projects - MICDA and Avehi Abacus. This is our third year in the fray and our target is to raise \$50K. Tarun, from his previous year's marathon experience, has compiled a collection of helpful tips, in case you want to give this a shot this year—and why not? The commitment for an event like this is a major challenge, as our runners will tell you; more so, when you know that you are running for a cause.

The other contribution to this newsletter is an update on the Asha 14 conference held in Chicago during the Veterans Day weekend. Ravi, our sole representative there, has penned his thoughts on some of the most important agenda items discussed. Though it is not possible to do justice to the conference in such a short space, this collection of highlights will give you a feel of how Asha works as an international community (with chapters in almost all the continents—did I hear Antarctica somewhere???)

Well, Asha has been working on different group events and fund-raisers with the easy camaraderie of the volunteers as a welcome add-on (I must insist that this is a real flat, non-hierarchical organization); to expand our learning and knowledge base which is necessary for the growth of any such organization and also to create volunteer awareness about the state of education in India, we decided to hold a day-long workshop on the different aspects of learning and education in the Indian context. The idea was conceived by Srijan, one of our chapter coordinators, and it was held in a very relaxed setting with a lot of interesting discussion sessions. Srijan has written down his thoughts and his takes about this whole effort in this edition of the newsletter. Continuing on the same note, Asha Seattle recently organized a talk by Harsh Mander, the noted social activist. His talk was focused on strengthening Indian democracy and promoting social justice in the current context. In the next few weeks, we will be hosting Ravi Kuchimanchi where he discusses his experience as a founder of AID (Association for India's Development).

Well, this is all for now. Thank you again for your continued support to Asha and its activities. Do keep on checking our website for updates and notices of upcoming events.

-Asha Seattle Team.

A Day-long Learning Session – Revisiting Asha's Direction

-Srijan Chakraborty

Asha's primary objective has been children's education and this has been the driving force behind our efforts at bringing about a socioeconomic change in India. However, our field experience has taught us one thing and that is, one cannot

look at education in isolation. There are many factors including basic nutrition and health that are critical to the success of any education project. To learn about some of the current issues relevant to our work and to discuss some of the ways that can maximize our efforts, we had a one day workshop attended by volunteers of Asha Seattle,

We revisited the PROBE report – Public Report on Basic Education in India published in 1998 by individual social activists and development economists based on extensive field surveys. This is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the state of education in India. With the help of

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statistical data, this report clarifies many popular myths about the Indian education system and the parents' attitude towards education in general. Contrary to popular conception, this report establishes that Indian parents, in general, are aware not only of the importance of education for their children (98% for boy child and 89% for girl child) but also of the importance of the 'quality' of education imparted (in the most common sense of the term).

Some telling data on the health awareness revealed some very shocking statistics: for example, about 47% of the children in India (from 0 to 35 months of age) suffer from moderate to severe malnourishment. The corresponding number for Sub-Saharan Africa is 26% and for South Asia as a whole is 46%.

Infant mortality rates in India are higher than the average of all the developing countries. The saddest part is that most of this malnourishment is due to reasons that are very easily curable or preventable – for example diarrhea, malaria, measles, lack of prenatal care, etc. This is especially an area that is very critical to the success of most of the Asha projects in India.

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Asha started its journey barely a decade back. Over the past couple of years we have not only expanded our volunteer base but we have made tremendous strides in the amount of money that we have disbursed to various NGOs in India (more than a million dollars in the year 2004 alone from Asha-US chapters). Working with our project partners in India has been a very rewarding and learning experience. One way to have a broader level of impact is to influence policy making and that requires some amount of advocacy work. For example, mid-day meal scheme in India came about due to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). It is amazing what impact we can have!

Overall we had a very productive day and it was a very good learning experience for all of us. Held in a relaxed setting, the overall level of participation and enthusiasm among the participating volunteers was tremendous. We are planning to have such informal workshops regularly from time to time.

Srijan is one of the chapter coordinators of Asha Seattle. He can be contacted at srijan@gmail.com

Asha 14- My reflections on the Asha Wide conference, Chicago, 2005

-Ravi Manghani

This was my first Asha wide conference, not counting the Asha West Coast conference 2004 at Seattle. A big incentive for me to attend the conference was to see some faces which till then had been only email ids in the Asha mailing list discussions, or those voices that I had got used to on Asha-wide conference calls. I took a red-eye to Chicago on Friday night (May 29th) to be on time for the key-note address (but importantly for morning breakfast!). There couldn't have been a better start to the conference than to have Dr. J. P. Prakash (National Coordinator and founder of Lok Satta, People Power). He has been a champion for a non-partisan people's movement for better governance. He gave a powerful keynote address of how Asha can fit in and focus on simple interventions in school education, university schooling, health care and creating leadership opportunities.

There were many interesting sessions and it will require more than just a page to truly share the learning and experiences shared in each one of them. There were a lot of action items and these have been listed on:

<http://asha14minutes.blogspot.com>

Most importantly, I would like to mention a few, for example a fund-raising proposal where Gautam Patil, an experienced

climber from Bay Area will be climbing the Mt. Everest in the summer of 2006 (for more details, please contact me at the email id listed below). For this, an Asha-climb group has been set-up for managing the logistics. The Chicago chapter is also working towards an Asha Representative Council (ARC) process for Tsunami recovery proposals. In addition, Vignesh (Secretary, Asha) talked about "International registration" to enable Asha to move out the mode of constant fire-fighting and to get more organizational accountability. There were presentations on right to information and right to campaign. Anand (Project Coordinator, Asha) talked about the impact of the Asha projects in general touching on the core values of Asha's mission statement, that is, empowerment through education.

There were few breakout sessions dealing with Asha fellowship process, Tsunami recovery work, Asha and technology, Asha sanctuary, and working with Government schools. There were updates from the treasury, web, publicity, and fund-raising teams. Most importantly, we had a long session dedicated to drafting an ARC proposal which envisions a one-step approval of Asha-India projects that have met a defined set of criteria. Few volunteers from Chicago chapter are also working on getting a better software tool for treasury team and this will be shared Asha wide eventually.

The end note address was delivered by Sam Pitroda, an internationally respected telecom inventor, management guru and entrepreneur best known for revolutionizing telecommunication in India during his tenure as Chief Technology advisor to the then PM, Rajiv Gandhi. He talked about knowledge- its relevance and access, connectivity

and applications, knowledge concepts related to university education, research institutes and patent laws and lastly about e-governance. He briefed us about his role as the chair of National Knowledge Commission; constituted by India's current Prime Minister, Dr. Singh.

The conference was attended by 60-65 volunteers from 30 chapters, including Germany and newly formed Canada chapter. It is not possible to have been to an Asha conference and not talk about food and the famous all-night discussions. Kudos to Asha Chicago volunteers for arranging our stay at a hostel; it was a great choice as all Asha volunteers stayed under one roof

(going well with the spirit of Asha) debating into the wee hours of dawn over multiple shots of Red Bull.

No trip is complete for me without missing a flight, and I didn't disappoint this time either. After an extended stay at one of the Chicago volunteer's house on Monday night, I returned to Seattle all charged up on Tuesday afternoon, with fond memories, new friends, and the same mission: to bring about socioeconomic change through medium of education.

Ravi Manghani is one of the chapter coordinators of Asha Seattle. He can be contacted at ravi@u.washington.edu



Running the Marathon: where to start

-Tarun Bhalla

Completing a 26.2 mile run can be one of

the most exhilarating times of your life. Or it can be one of the most humbling and painful experiences you can live through. However, as our Coach Chuck says, it would turn out to be one of the greatest experiences only if you are mentally, physically and emotionally prepared. Further, once you know that you are doing it for a cause (like I did for Asha which focuses on underprivileged children's education), the joys of the experience automatically grow ten times.

In order to ensure that you are prepared for the marathon experience, here are few things to remember before you start training:

Build a Base: The first thing to evaluate is your current physical condition. Many experts believe that a solid mileage base of 20-25 miles per week and a long run of approximately 6 miles is a must before you consider training for a marathon.

In case, you are not running that much, this does not mean that you cannot build a base. It is challenging, but not impossible.

Use the Right Equipment: As you settle into your training schedule and the weekly mileage and long runs increase, you need to decide up front what running equipment is right for you.

First, think about your shoes. Which type of shoes work best for you? Is your current pair comfortable? What is the mileage on the pair you are wearing? Will they make it through both the training and the marathon?

Socks are another small but not inconsequential thing to consider. Which type work best for you (i.e. thin, thick, two layers, etc.)? A good pair of socks is crucial for maintaining your comfort level during a grueling marathon run.

Next, consider your running apparel. Chafing is a major concern especially during long runs like the marathon. Also consider how much and what type of clothing you need to be comfortable but

not feel uncomfortable or overheated (i.e. tights, long-sleeves, hat, gloves, etc.)

Beyond apparel, consider those items you might need to put on your body to reduce pain and inflammation during the marathon (analgesic creams for pain and vaseline/bodylube for chafing or energy gels that you carry for sustenance).

Cross Training: An athlete can both rest and work out at the same time by cross-training. Cross-training gives you a break from the pounding of running while still receiving aerobic benefits. Great cross-training activities include cycling, swimming, cross-country skiing, strength training, and even some stretching.

Marathon training is a process where you break the body down so that it will rebuild itself stronger than before. In order for the rebuilding process to occur, you must give yourself the proper amount of rest in between periods of intense activity. It is recommended that beginners schedule 2-3 nonconsecutive days for complete rest (no cross-training) while intermediate to advanced runners may want to incorporate some cross-training on two of the days that novices are resting.

Eat Right: Eating a proper diet is very crucial for marathon training. Complex carbohydrates should make up at least 65% of your normal dietary intake during most of your training. In the final few days before the marathon, increase the amount of complex carbohydrates you are consuming. This is called Carboloading. It works by adding additional glycogen to your body which is the fuel your muscles will burn while running. Additionally, glycogen means more running miles without "hitting the wall".

There is more to the training tips and I have not covered all of them. However, following these would be good to start with. If you have any more questions please feel free to send me a note at tarun.bhalla@gmail.com

In compiling this note, I have relied on several web-resources and Chuck's training sessions, as well as put in personal observations.