



Asha Kiran

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

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Greetings Everyone,

In this edition of the newsletter we share with you what we learned from one of our guest speakers, Mr. E.S. Ramamurthy who visited Seattle in May. After a long career in industry in both public and the private sector, Mr. Ramamurthy got involved with social work and took up the challenge of improving the performance of public schools in Karnataka under the project Sikshana. The article on Sikshana focuses on their goal and work. Their efforts have significantly helped improve the performance of the Government schools they work with.

The Indian constitution asserts that right to education is a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14. However, the reality is quite different – we have more than 14 million children out of school. We have a very high drop out rate. And even for those who are in school, the quality of education is really abysmal. In August 2005 the central government finally came up with a draft "Right To Education" (RTE) bill. In our article on the RTE bill we discuss some of the highlights of this bill and many concerns raised by various groups on this Bill. Our chapter is reviewing the bill in detail and we will share our detailed comments on the bill once it is ready.

We have a few announcements – one, our annual Subeer D. Manhas Charitable Golf Tournament is coming up on Sunday October 1 st. If you are interested in joining us, please see the details in the event information. Two, our signature event – AllGoRhythms – a Bollywood

music concert - is coming up on 14 th and 15th October. Yes, we are having this musical event on two days to better accommodate for your schedule and increased number of audience this year!

We want to thank the eight brave bikers who biked 206 miles from Seattle to Portland as part of Asha Seattle's "Wheels of Change" program this year to raise funds for our projects in India. Thanks for all your support and encouragement. You can check out the profiles of our bikers at: www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/stp

As you know, we are a completely volunteer driven organization and we are always in need of more hands and minds. If you are interested in volunteering with us, please drop us a line or call us or just come to one of our meetings (meeting schedule is online as well as at the back of this newsletter). Volunteers like you help us keep our organizational overhead zero so that we can spend every penny donated to us for projects in India.

For more information visit our webpage www.ashanet.org/seattle. We thank you for your continued support in reaching out to the underprivileged communities in India and being part of the change we all are working towards. We value your comments and suggestions and keep them coming.

Thank you,
The Asha Seattle Team.

Sikshana: Improving Public School Performance

As part of our series of talks we organize to learn and increase awareness in the local community we had E.S. Ramamurthy in Seattle to talk about Sikshana – an effort at a breakthrough in the public education system. Mr. ES Ramamurthy is the founder member of Sivasri Trust, which undertakes the Sikshana project. After a long and distinguished career in the industry, he served as a Senior Adviser to the Govt. of India for a while before getting involved with social causes.

The vision of Sikshana is to evolve a sustainable and replicable model for an effective and decentralized public education system based on good management practices. The core concept of Sikshana is to enhance learning levels by focusing on motivational efforts (for both students and teachers), providing essential inputs, training and guiding schools and implementing cost-effective innovative ideas. Dr. Ramamurthy strongly feels well established management principles can be applied to improve performance for public schools. Sikshana is not a direct provider of education or an alternate educational model, it's a volunteer driven program working with the existing educational framework. The school also has to come forward to participate in the program and recognize the benefit of it.

A Sikshana school is one which is willing to analyse and find its own

solutions to problems with guidance and support and willing to set and work towards quantified goals. They also seek and uses resources efficiently, commensurate with goals set and the teachers strive to work as a team along with the parents and the community to achieve the goals. The focus of all plans and activities is motivation of the teacher and the child towards excellence. As part of the program Sikshana supplies books or note books, teaching aids etc., deploys additional teachers, funds kids' education through high school, builds additional class rooms where space is critical, ensures power, water supply and sanitation in the school. As part of the motivational efforts they train the existing staff for better performance, improve the environment in the existing class rooms, organize for prizes and scholarships for kids, provide PCs and multimedia content and also organizes sports, cultural events and educational tours.

Mr. Ramamurthy shared his experiences on working with government schools and how very simple steps, even just talking to the teachers and providing them with some motivational support, help improve a school's performance. A simple educational trip to some place for the kids goes a long way to sustain their interest in education and helps increase their outlook.

(Cont. on pg2)

Sikshana started with only a handful of schools, but now in four years it has now increased it's scope to 28 schools. Over the years, this program has successfully increased the enrolment of kids in schools and increased the pass rate and average marks. In fact, in some cases, they have initiated reverse migration of students from neighbouring private schools to government schools. Sikshana has used a model

developed by Azim Premji Foundation for quantitative assessment of the schools under their program. A reasonably good indication of the impact is obtained by averaging the figures over a cluster of schools. Going forward Sikshana hopes to replicate their model in various parts of the country to improve the quality of education in government schools.

Right to Education Bill: Where are we going?

After more than 50 years of independence nearly 14 million children are out of school in India (from ASER report 2005). However the constitution guarantees the right to education to all children between the ages 6 to 14. In a judgment, Supreme Court of India in 1993 recognized Fundamental Right to Education for children up to the age of 14 and asked government to implement the same. In 2002, The 86th Constitution Amendment Act added Article 21A affirming that every child between the age of 6 and 14 years has the right to free and compulsory education making it a fundamental right. A Right to Education (RTE) bill was finally drafted in 2005 to give effect to this amendment. You can access the entire bill at: www.pratham.org/documents/righttoeducationbill2005.pdf

This is a very important bill that has the potential to bring about a significant transformation in elementary education in India in the years to come. Government of India has invited comments on the bill. In Asha, an organization primarily working in the area of education, we felt that it's our responsibility to actively take part in finalizing this bill and lobbying for it as appropriate. We have diligently gone through the entire bill, sought comments from our partner groups in India and analyzed different aspects of this bill. This bill asserts that every child in the age group of 6 to 14 has the right to free and compulsory education of equitable quality. Some highlights of this bill are:

- Every neighborhood will have a school, such that every child has access to a school within the neighborhood of the residence of the child. The bill also defines a set of minimum standards that every school has to conform to including basic infrastructure requirements to teacher-student ratio etc.
- Introduces 25% reservation in state schools of specified categories and unaided private schools for children from the weaker section.
- Any screening procedure while deciding admission to any school at elementary stage or accepting any form of capitation fee is prohibited in this bill.
- Introduces a administrative body called the School Management Committee (SMC) that not only oversees the functioning of the school, but also takes part in day to day administrative work of the school

including managing the assets of the school, disbursing salary of the teachers, facilitate development of the school using grants.

- Central government will constitute a body called the National Commission for Elementary Education (NCEE) that will continuously monitor the implementation of this act and recommend corrective measures where necessary.

This draft bill has received a lot of comments and criticisms from various circles. Some of the major criticisms include:

1. Excluding the 0-6 age group out of the bill
2. Giving the SMCs too much power and responsibility including day to day administrative responsibility with a very short ramp-up time
3. Lack of clarity about the rights of children with special needs and how those will be implemented.
4. The lack of government responsibility and financial commitment for the bill to get implemented.

These are just a few of many comments raised by various groups. We are in the process of finalizing a document with all our thoughts. Once we have all our comments consolidated, we will share that with you.

With all it's shortcomings and ambiguities, the RTE bill is still seen as a ray of hope with the potential to significantly change the elementary education arena in India. It was shocking, therefore, when we learned that the central government is citing lack of funds to implement this bill and instead send a model bill to the states for them to make a legislation of their own accordingly. A central legislation is critical towards making elementary education a fundamental right as required under Article 21A of the constitution and it is the central government's constitutional obligation to enact this piece of legislation. The 25% reservation in private schools for children from the weaker section was also later dropped from the draft bill. Various groups working in the area of education are staging protest against this shift of responsibility from center to state. As Asha, we are keeping a close eye on this issue and would take action as appropriate. We will keep you updated.



Seven Bikers completed Seattle to Portland ride this year as part of the

“Wheels of Change” program of Asha Seattle to raise funds for underprivileged children in India.

To check out the bikers' profile and support their ride go to <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/stp/bikers.php>

In the picture (from left to right) Vijay, Sudarshan, Raji and Vaibhav after completing the grueling 206 miles on their bikes.



THE 6TH ANNUAL
SUBEER D. MANHAS CHARITABLE
GOLF TOURNAMENT
BENEFITING ASHA FOR EDUCATION

Sunday, October 1st, 2006

Willows Run Golf Club – Eagle's Talon Course
Redmond, Washington

www.willowsrun.com

Tee time: 8 am (reverse shot-gun start)

(Please arrive by 7am for registration and warm-up)

Lunch and Awards Ceremony to follow tournament, with prizes for:

Gross Score Competition | *Net Score Competition*
Net Team Best Ball Competition | *Various Skills Competition*

\$100 suggested donation per player

100% of proceeds to benefit Asha for Education
(Please make checks payable to: Asha for Education)

Please RSVP (with handicap) to Subeer by 9/15/06
Email: Subeer.Manhas@morganstanley.com | Phone 425.455.8059

Creating your own teams is encouraged but not necessary.
If interested in sponsoring a hole, please contact Subeer

Tournament limited to 60 participants

Enjoy the Bollywood Masala music and dance to the dhinchak tunes of

All Good Rhythms

Saturday, 14th October 2006, 5:30PM ~ Sunday, 15th October 2006, 3:00PM *

Mercer Island High School, Performing Arts Center, Mercer Island

Tickets- <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle>

For tickets and more information contact: Archana Soy, (425) 882-1899 archanasoy@hotmail.com

Kavita Sharma, (425) 785-3177 ka_sharma@hotmail.com

*Please check our webpage for any updates