



Asha Kiran

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

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Greetings all!

Welcome back! In this edition we present to you a site visit report on one of Asha-Seattle's many partner projects. Alongside this, we also give you articles by our very own volunteers' on Asha-Seattle's Biodegradable efforts, our ongoing support to the Bangalore based Hemophilic society, and the answers to the quiz published in the last edition. Did you score on the quiz then? Check it out!

We thank you very much readers for your ongoing support, understanding and contributions to Asha and Asha-Seattle. Please feel free to contact us for any questions regarding any projects we support or any concerns you may have. We look forward to hearing from you and your continued support.

Asha Seattle Team

Pachai Nirame, Pachai Nirame* (How We Greened Geetanjali)

By Raji Harikrishnan

Geetanjali has always been that one bright spark in the otherwise dull winters in Seattle. Every year, March brings with it the eager anticipation of Asha's annual Tamil light music show. I look forward to everything about Geetanjali: the lilting melodies, the peppy dance numbers and the audience games.

Well, not everything actually.

At the end of the concert, I would find myself staring at a mountain of trash—massive quantities of Styrofoam containers, plastic spoons, paper cups and napkins. The greater the audience turnout, the more successful the concert, the higher the mountain of food waste. The hum on my lips of a song from earlier in the evening would come to an abrupt halt. I would shrug my shoulders and join other volunteers as we wound our way to the dumpsters carrying bag after bag of non-biodegradable trash.

This has always bothered me quite a bit. It is almost as if we have come to embrace the gargantuan quantities of trash generated at such concerts, accepting it as an inevitable consequence of the success of the event. After all, We have to feed an audience of 600+ people, the caterers serve food only in Styrofoam and plastic, the food waste is condemned to go to the landfill, do we even have a choice in the matter?

Turns out, we do. And this year, we exercised that choice and consciously took steps to lighten Geetanjali's ecological footprint.

It all came together rather suddenly and rapidly. The Geetanjali coordination team had almost finished preparations for the event: the caterer had been booked, the menu had been decided and tickets were almost sold out. It was around this time that a few of us started griping over email about how we could use more environmentally friendly options for serving food. A heated debate ensued. Would the caterer agree to use eco-friendly boxes? Would the boxes be significantly more expensive? Would the containers withstand the onslaught of hot Indian food stored for a few hours until dinner time? Would we get approval

from Waste Management to compost the food waste? With this barrage of questions and the event a mere 2 weeks away, you would imagine that we would let the matter slide until next year's Geetanjali.

But that's not what happens when you have a bunch of highly motivated Asha volunteers who also happen to be ardent tree huggers :-). A rapid-fire exchange of emails, internet searches, and several phone calls later we located a vendor in sunny Palo Alto, California who seemed to sell containers that matched our requirements pretty well. Even better, the boxes were fair-trade.

Next lay the challenge of convincing the caterer about why we wanted to make the switch from Styrofoam and plastic, and allaying his fears about the durability of the eco-friendly containers. One of our volunteers who was down in the Bay area picked up some sample boxes from the vendor, brought them back to Seattle and took them to the caterer for testing. We waited nervously to hear back. Much to our relief he gave us the thumbs up. A flurry of phone calls and emails followed; an expedited order was placed for eco-friendly, compostable containers, spoons, cups, napkins (and even tiny soufflé containers for serving gulab jamuns!) Meanwhile we started following up with Waste Management who agreed to compost the food waste in their test bed. The shipment arrived just in the nick of time, a day and a half before the event. The volunteers from the food team had their work cut out—helping the caterer pack food in the containers carefully, and keeping a close eye on the packed containers to make sure they held up until dinner time.

Everything went smoothly and dinner went off without a hitch. When the volunteers at the food tables handed out the food containers, they requested people to do two things: 1) put the containers in the correct (green) trash bins for composting, and 2), in an effort to minimize consumption, take just enough napkins and utensils as needed. People were very receptive, taking just 1-2 napkins and diligently disposing their containers in the green compost bins instead of the regular trash bins.

Many people appreciated the fact that we switched to eco-friendly containers and that Asha was actively trying to reduce the consumption of disposables at events such as Geetanjali. We also received good feedback about how well the containers held up.

We had anticipated that this new system of waste management would cause some confusion, but were pleasantly surprised to see the compost bins were filled more than we expected to thanks to cooperation and support from the audience. We had a huge quantity of trash as always, but this time it was not destined for the landfill.

Of course, this begs the obvious question: Does this even matter in the first place? Why all the fuss about switching to eco-friendly containers? Why should it mean anything to Asha?

From what we have seen, read and heard, pro-environment choices usually have a very high correlation with social equity that is so central to the guiding principles of organizations like Asha. By buying fair-trade we discourage child labor and unfair wage practices. We believe that the earth needs to be accorded the same respect that we accord its people.

Making the switch to eco-friendly containers is something that many of us at Asha have been contemplating for a long time—way before green became the new black and being eco-friendly started being regarded as hip and trendy. We just did not have enough volunteer resources to sufficiently research how to make the shift up until now. Along came Geetanjali this year, and a critical mass of volunteers decided it was time to shake off our inertia and take the plunge, driving the idea from conception to completion. During the course of making this change we

realized that the existing solution has its share of caveats and that further improvements are desired for subsequent events. We believe very strongly that this is a step in the right direction, and more significantly, one that has long-term impact. We hope that our experience inspires other organizations in the Seattle area to make the switch as well. We would be very happy to share our learnings with them.

This year, for the first time in five Geetanjalis, I went home with the hum on my lips intact.

Note: Many thanks to Arvind Kannan for his inputs to the article. As part of the team of dedicated volunteers at the food tables that day, he was witness to the great support we received from the audience.

**Pachai Nirame, Pachai Nirame (Green Color, Green Color) is a song from Mani Ratnam's Tamil film Alaipayuthey, which was remade as Saathiya in Hindi.*

The Hemophiliac Society of Bangalore visits Redmond

By Soumya Ganapathy

In June 2008, Ranjana Ramchander from the Hemophilia Society of Bangalore, visited Asha-Seattle and spoke on the Microsoft-Redmond campus. Ranjana and her late husband co-founded the society several years ago not only to educate the community about hemophilia, but also to serve as an advocacy group for people with the disease.

Hemophilia is an X-linked genetic bleeding disorder. It is prevalent throughout the world at a rate of 1 in 30000. People with this disease lack certain clotting factors and tend to bleed longer and more severely. It can be debilitating because it affects the joints, eyes, and even the

central nervous system. There is no cure for hemophilia but there is treatment available for the bleeding episodes. Certain clotting factors that are deficient in hemophiliacs are administered during episodes of bleeding. Unfortunately, these factors can be extremely costly for many people. Ranjana and the Hemophilia Society of Bangalore successfully lobbied the Karnataka government to provide these factors free of charge for patients with the disease. This was a remarkable feat. She and the society hope to continue to improve care and treatment for hemophiliacs in India and hope to partner with Asha in the future.

Past

Wheels of Change (Seattle to Portland Bike Ride)
July 12-13

E V E N T S

Upcoming

Asha West Coast Conference: August 30-September 1
AllGoRhythms - October 18



Asha for Education presents our 11th annual fundraiser, Work An Hour (WAH) which runs from July 15th to Sept 15th 2008. WAH is a summer-long, global, online fundraising campaign based on a simple concept - participants are asked to symbolically Work an Hour towards the cause of children's education by donating an

hour's worth or more of their salary. Our goal is to raise \$200,000 that will benefit 15 projects across rural India. Donors can choose which project they would like to support. Asha-Seattle's project, Vigyan Ashram, is one of the featured WAH projects. To learn more, donate and spread the word please visit www.workanhour.org

ANSWERS puzzler

There is some relevance of the answer to the meta clue to education in India.

- What follows after our existence on earth – the great beyond! _ _ T _ _ L _ _ _ AFTERLIFE
- Abi strangely held the Hoysaleswara temple here. _ _ _ _ _ _ HALEBID
- g e g s _ _ _ A B _ _ _ _ _ SCRAMBLED EGGS
- Attempt to cover objective is fashionable. _ R _ _ _ TRENDY
- Eyeglasses finally trimmed in a public display. _ _ E _ _ _ _ E SPECTACLE

Meta clue:

Asha Seattle. Vidyutsadasivapuram. Connect!

MICDA

Contributor:
Rajiv Bharadwaja,
Asha Seattle volunteer

Tomorrow's Foundation

By Vijay Kanagala

Tomorrow's Foundation (TF) started in 1991 with the objective of providing the basic amenities of shelter, education, nutrition and counseling support to the underprivileged children of Kolkata. It was initially started as a means to provide non-formal education and some nutrition to a handful of local children from the terrace of 'Normal Hriday' run by Mother Teresa in Kalighat, one of the slum areas of south Kolkata. These children were mainly from the streets and the red-light areas of Kalighat and its adjoining areas.

TF expanded its activities to include mid-day meal, uniforms, education materials, pre-vocational and vocational training, cultural classes, health support (mental and physical), community awareness and more. It provides technical guidance for children to choose suitable career paths by identifying their hidden talents and interests. TF also started a model school, the aim of which is to provide education to the children in a child-friendly manner through joyful learning. The model school provides computer education and skill development classes in addition to career counseling.



Teachers helping the students prepare for their board exams in Half Way Home

The Half Way Home (HWH) started in 2004 to provide a home-like atmosphere for homeless children. HWH provides the necessary education, nutrition, and counseling (both psychological and career) along with shelter and protection to the children in need. Many students stay here to prepare for their board exams: the 10th and the 12th grade exams.



Monthly meeting with the teachers of classes 5 to 10

In order to eliminate the problem of children dropping out of formal schooling, TF started remedial coaching after school. If children do not receive proper guidance from parents in finishing their daily homework, they gradually lose interest in studying and stop attending classes. The remedial coaching centers are held to provide necessary help in finishing homework and to prepare for the next class lessons. Sessions are held daily in the evening on the government school premises.

The pre-vocational training centers provide positive alternative engagements for children who drop out of school. Children, from the 1st std. onwards, have the facility to learn an activity along with their formal education. When children lose interest in studying they can become engaged in extra curricular activities, developing requisite skills for the future. Similarly, there are vocational training centers that are aimed at developing work skills and providing job opportunities for adolescent children. Training courses include nursing and carpentry to name a couple. TF successfully found job opportunities for 37 children from this program in 2007. It aims to provide placement opportunities for 61 more students in 2008. TF Card Project accommodates many trainees who show an inclination towards printing/gift card design. Their products compete with other manufacturers; they participate in various fairs and exhibitions like the Patna Fair organized by the State Government of Bihar.



Products designed/produced by vocational program trainees

Tomorrow's Foundation (TF) started in 1991 with the objective of providing the basic amenities of shelter, education, nutrition and counseling support to the underprivileged children of Kolkata. It was initially started



A community based education center

In 2005, TF started community based education centers, in different slum areas of Kolkata to reach the children who cannot afford to go to school. Most of these children reside in the streets and the slums, children of sex workers, refugees and migrant families. They are 5 to 9 years old.

The intention is to prepare children for the formal schooling system within a span of 2 years. TF mainstreamed 467 of 500 students by July 2007. These children now act as role models for other children in the community who do not go to school. The children's parents and other community members have taken the responsibilities of the education centers into their own hands; it has become their project. The community's participation speaks to the belief in the centers' power to inspire children. In August 2007, TF picked a fresh set of 500 children from the slum areas and expects to mainstream them into formal schooling by June 2009.



A medical camp organized by Health Cell. Dr. Karmakar & Dr. Leena Banerjee treated the children on 17th & 18th January-08 at Dharmadas Trust Model School.

TF's cultural unit provides classes on music, dance, drama, art and yoga once a week. These classes provide a therapeutic release that helps children cope with their traumatic experiences. Classes tap into hidden talents and other leadership qualities of the children, thus boosting self-esteem. Children participate in different cultural functions, draw and paint for

exhibitions, make souvenirs and participate in many competitions.

TF's provides health care and support to the community children. A clinic for general health care, eye and dental problems is conducted once a week for children 1 to 18 years old. TF also creates health and hygiene awareness in the community.

A Few Success Stories

Munmun Paul, one of the first TF graduates, came back to TF to teach and guide students. She serves as a big example for many who have just enrolled into TF's programs. She drew her first salary through a financial accounting job in November of 2007.



Subrata Debnath studies at Kailash Vidyamandir. He is a student of Class IX. He lives with his mother in the footpath that lies right in front of the Overseas Bank in Kalighat. His mother runs a clothing business on the footpath. Subrata dreams of being a Kick Boxer. This year Subrata won a Gold Medal from the Junior Level (56 Kg) category at the National Level of Kick Boxing Competition. He loves computers and acting. He is an important actor in the Drama team at TF.



Kalyani could not pass the Secondary exams. But she has nothing to lose for today she runs her own business. She completed the Beautician course with support from TF. Income from business has shown the light of sufficiency in her life. In the future, Kalyani wants to support children in need.



Samir Bayan lives in the slums of Sarat Bose Road He has been with Tomorrow's Foundation since he was a child. With support from TF, he successfully passed the Higher Secondary exams and is currently studying for his B.A from the Netaji Open School. Samir also works for a private organization. He is learning computer applications through TF's computer literacy program.



References:

Site visit reports by Asha volunteers
www.tomorrowsfoundation.org
TF Annual report-2006