



Asha Kiran

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

VOLUME 15 - ISSUE 3 OCTOBER 2009



Greetings,

The last quarter has been quite busy for Asha volunteers organizing fund raising events trying to bridge our fundraising gap as well as investing in new efforts. We organized a Bollywood dance night and also hosted Indian Ocean – Live in Concert – both of these were new experiments for Asha Seattle for raising funds as well as reaching out to a new set of people and spread word about Asha, our work and our projects. We are inching towards our fundraising goal of \$925K this year with all your help. As of October 2nd, we have raised \$671K and we have \$254K more to raise by December 31st.

While some of us have branched out on new fund raising efforts, some are still busy working with projects which are close to our hearts. In this issue we bring news from two such projects - Mother India Community Development Association (MICDA) and GRAVIS. MICDA is a project focused on providing access to education to the children

of the poorest in Vidyutsadasivapuram village, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. GRAVIS is a project ensuring water security, better healthcare and education in Thar Desert. The article on GRAVIS in this issue provides a quick synopsis on GRAVIS.

Thank you all for your continued support and making these projects a reality.

We look forward to your support and participation in upcoming Asha Events – AllGoRhythms (its 10th year anniversary of the band!) and Sabeer Manhas Golf Tournament to name a few. This is also the time when many companies have their annual Give Campaign. Please support and spread the word about Asha within your workplace Give Campaign, if you have one.

*Happy Diwali! Eid Mubarak!
Asha Seattle Team*

MICDA – truly a community development project

By Sunil Laxman, [Asha Volunteer, Project Coordinator for MICDA]

MICDA is one of those fantastic projects you may never hear about outside of this newsletter, and yet it has made a dramatic difference to the community it works with. It is also a fine example of how Asha can make a big contribution towards achieving socio-economic development.

The organization was founded and is driven by the relentless zeal of Dr. Subbaramaiah. A government medical doctor by profession, his own life story is an inspiration for many. Having grown up in absolute poverty in a family of rural landless laborers, Dr. Subbaramaiah worked incredibly hard to get an education, got scholarships to complete his medical degree, and continued to work in the Chittoor district in Andhra. His desire to make a difference to the poorest and most downtrodden community in the area drove him to form the Mother India Community Development Association (MICDA).

MICDA started off to fight for the rights of landless laborers in a village some 20 km from the nearest small town, Puttur.

In this region, there is a large tract of land (over 750 acres), which was once undeveloped waste land. This land was to be allotted to a couple of hundred families of landless laborers who came from various backward/scheduled castes or tribes. Dr. Subbaramaiah founded MICDA to help the laborers get their allotted land. However, the story grew into cinematic proportions when rich, politically connected and powerful local landowners in the area decided to make an attempt to (illegally) occupy this now valuable land. MICDA then took up the cause for the rights of these laborers in what became a 25 year struggle. In this time, while under great personal risk, Dr. Subbaramaiah fought numerous court cases, prevented physical occupation of the land, had the land equitably distributed to the laborers, developed the village where these laborers now live, and created irrigation and water harvesting structures for the farms. Much of this work has been supported by Asha through a fellowship to Dr. Subbaramaiah, and was resolved only about a year ago, after decades of struggle, with the final land ownership document

allotment ("patta distribution"). Meanwhile, there was the issue of the children of all these families. With the support of Asha (the Silicon Valley chapter initially, and subsequently the Seattle and Delaware chapters) MICDA decided to start a school for all these children just outside this habitation.

The building of the school was a formidable task. At the time, the village was surrounded by forest, with only a 10 km dirt road leading to it from the highway. Yet, a fine school was constructed there, and during my first site visit (over 7 years ago) I was pleasantly surprised to be welcomed after a tiring journey at a well constructed school with airy, spacious classrooms, a large playing field and a well maintained garden. But teaching the students at the school was far more challenging. Each child (between 150-200 at any given point of time) was a first generation learner, coming from extremely poor, illiterate families that were often broken and had a history of family violence, drunken fathers and even abandoned mothers. It was a challenge for MICDA to even hire well qualified teachers, who had to commute by bus from Puttur or other nearby towns. Yet, right from the start Dr. Subbaramaiah did not want to compromise and insisted on hiring full graduate teachers serious about their profession. The initial years were a struggle, and it was commendable in itself that a number of students passed out of the school (though many dropped out). The youngest children starting grades 1 or 2 in were most promising because they would receive the benefit of 10 years of education at this school. Indeed, this prediction held up, and over the past few years, the results from the school have astounded most locals.

The past 3-4 years have seen fantastic results in the state board exams (grade 10), where all the students who appeared for the examinations have passed. Many have secured "first class" results, and two years ago the school produced the topper for the entire district (in the SC/ST category). This student has now been awarded a scholarship by the state government to study engineering in one of the newly formed Rajiv Gandhi Institutes of Technology. Many other children have now been admitted to local colleges for degree or diploma programs. Given their backgrounds and humble beginnings, the achievement is nothing short of astounding. In this time, the school (with support from Asha) built a kitchen for mid day meals, running water facilities,

a proper toilet for the students (a huge boon, particularly for the older girl students), and even a small science laboratory. Meanwhile, the school continues to battle problems, from serious funding crunches to rapid teacher turnover. The school is an attractive destination for new teachers, because it has done so well. But after a year or two of experience here, understandably many of them leave when offered permanent government teacher positions. There remains absolutely no source for local funding, and the school is almost completely reliant on Asha support for functioning. The impact that the MICDA School and the MICDA organization have had on the community is truly beyond measure. A casual glance at just the performance of the school reveals little that is remarkable. But a deeper understanding of the area, the backgrounds of the people there, and the sheer magnitude of problems faced show how much MICDA has achieved here. And it is with projects such as these, located in remote locations far away from the sight of media and cities, that Asha truly continues to make a difference.



Children having lunch at the MICDA school



A picture of the MICDA school

You can read more about MICDA's comprehensive efforts to work with and improve the living standards of the community in the area through various Asha Seattle supported projects:
<http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=111>
<http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=575>
<http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=409>

EVENTS

Past	Upcoming
Asha Seattle Picnic	Miles for Smiles - Nov 29th
RetroBash - Aug 09	Barah Aana screening - Oct 24th
Indian Ocean Concert - Sep 09	Sabeer Manhas Golf Tournament - Oct 4th
Algorithms - Oct 10th	Give campaign - 5th Oct through 30 Oct

“UNITED WE STAND”, Say THE WOMEN OF THE DESERT

By Eera Mittur [Asha Volunteer]

The Thar Desert, Rajasthan, India. Extreme harsh climates. Severe Scarcity of Water. Isolated from urban areas. Immense stress to look after their households. Lack of family support to stand on their own feet. Taboo that ‘they simply cannot’. Such is the environment surrounding the village women.

And YET, the spirits of these women go with a “UNITED WE STAND” attitude!!

UNITED they built Taankas, or rain-harvested water storages, for other village families.

UNITED they opened fresh vegetable and fruit shops for their village community.

UNITED they participate in village meetings with men folk and voice their concerns.

UNITED they give strength to their girls to go to school and learn.

UNITED they have broken many barriers and taboos cast on them.

UNITED these women STAND!

These village women are given unanimous support by GRAVIS (since 1983) to stay united and enrich their villages.

GRAVIS is an Asha-Seattle project partner since 2008. We fund GRAVIS nearly \$10,000 a year so they can support the women of the Thar.

Asha-Seattle currently supports close to 50 projects in 12



Indian states that include one or more schools and cater to the wellbeing of women and children. Asha-Seattle has carefully chosen her projects with the highest integrity, and GRAVIS is one such project.

It is your support to GRAVIS that helps support the women of the Thar. This year 2009 Asha-Seattle has already raised \$654,000 out of \$925,000; we need \$272,000 to ensure every project like GRAVIS continue rendering their support.

I have pledged to support GRAVIS. Will you help me raise \$10,000?

Contact me on how to donate (email: emittur.4.actions@gmail.com; name: Eera Mittur)

Support Asha during this giving campaign

Asha partners with grassroot organizations in India working towards empowerment of underprivileged sections of the society. It works in the fields of education, healthcare, livelihood, gender issues & advocating for human-rights.

- **Accountable**
- **Transparent**
- **Effective**
- **Zero Overhead**
- **Focus on Empowerment**

