

## Editorial

Dear Reader,

Welcome back, and welcome to our first issue of Asha Kiran in 2011. We kicked off the new year with the "New Year, New You - Resolution Run" on the 23rd of January. There were close to 100 people that attended the event, many of whom were first time runners that eventually decided to support Asha by taking part in the upcoming Team Asha half marathon.

We would like to thank you all for making Geetanjali a huge success in its 8th year. Read more about Geetanjali 2011 in this issue.

We would like to showcase the work of our project partners in every issue of Asha Kiran. This time, the Partner Showcase

column features Ravi Aluganti, an Asha Fellow, who has dedicated his life to helping children realize their true potential by coming up with innovative ways of making learning enjoyable with fun activities.

What is it like, to overcome fears and train for a distance running event with Team Asha? Read Heather Seemuth-Johnson's inspiring write up, where she shares her experiences doing exactly that.

Thank you, as always, for your support of Asha for Education, Seattle chapter.

- Asha Kiran Newsletter team

## Partner Showcase

### Ravi Aluganti Fellowship, Andhra Pradesh

Ravi Aluganti, a teacher from The Valley School, Bangalore, was ready to leave his life of comfort behind with a simple mission - "To provide educational experiences that are truly joyful and realize the potential of every child, even while equipping them with skills to face tomorrow" - for the children going to government schools in rural Andhra Pradesh. He was looking for an organization willing to support his initiative and thus began Asha Seattle's partnership with Ravi Aluganti in 2001, through Asha's Fellowship program.

Since then, Ravi has worked with 15 government schools in Madanapalle mandal of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. Ravi is an excellent teacher who can turn any lesson into a fun activity. He extensively uses activity-based learning (ABL) and is extremely good at multi-grade teaching. He is also a great resource person and creates his teaching material himself.

In 2003, Ravi, with support of Asha Seattle started a mobile library to improve the reading skills of children, who otherwise did not have access to any printed material other than their text books. The program is a huge success!

When he started as an Asha Fellow, Ravi was also hoping to influence/train government school teachers, in his teaching

methods. Unfortunately, this was only partially successful for multiple reasons - teacher indifference, transfers etc. To address the lack of continuity in schools, Ravi, with support of Asha Seattle, started an Education Facilitator program in 2005. The programs aims to find/train local youth who can then work on a continuous basis with a given school. This too hasn't been highly successful. Identifying & retaining education facilitators has been a great challenge. Ravi worked with 9 education facilitators since the program started, and there were no more than 3 at any given time.



Flash Cards used for teaching Telugu (prepared by Ravi and his education facilitators)

To better demonstrate the effectiveness of his methods and to use his time effectively, Ravi and we have been thinking of starting a new resource center that will also act as a hub and provide resources

for teacher training. But the proposal has been on hold for 2 years now due to lack of funds. We hope to address this in 2011 with support from donors like you.

Learn more about Ravi Aluganti's work through Asha @ <http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=279>

## Team Asha – My surprising journey

By Heather Seemuth-Johnson

At the end of January, I was struggling to find motivation. I was finding work busier after the holidays. The gym was packed. I was finding it challenging to continue dragging myself outside in the cold, dark & rainy Seattle weather. I felt like I needed to do something! I was already considering trying to run the Rock n' Roll half marathon in June – despite my complete lack of training – thanks to the “*subtle*” encouragement from a good friend.

So, here I was debating what to do to get my act in gear... and then I stumbled upon a flyer for Asha's “**New Year—New You, Resolution Run**” at Marymoor Park. It was a free event, that welcomed all levels of runners, and it sounded like it would be a fun gathering of people. I had run some in the past but not more than a few very slow miles. I'll admit I was slightly intimidated of going both because mostly I wasn't sure I could run the whole distance (and what if everyone else could??) and because I'm not a part of the Indian culture



The author, at Asha Seattle's New Year—New You, Resolution Run

(would I be welcomed and fit-in okay??). I didn't have any other plans **so why not?** Maybe it would be just the push I needed.

I got to the park and saw a fairly large group gathering for the run. It was easy to locate and we got lucky that the weather was decent. There were plenty of men, women, some children and even a dog or two. I was relieved to see people of varying degrees of fitness. Everyone was incredibly friendly and welcoming.

I had a great time on that first run. I was motivated by all the other people around me. Everyone was wonderful at supporting & cheering each other on. I was ecstatic to find others, who like me, had similar goals – the Rock n' Roll Half Marathon.

I got to learn about **Asha for Education** and the “**Team Asha**” program. I liked being able to get information on the “Team Asha” program and meet the group running coach **Ben**

**Rixe**, without feeling pressured. I was incredibly impressed that **Asha for Education** is a 100% volunteer organization. They are able to do so much good for people who really need the help. I was impressed by the how they select projects and the follow-up that occurs to ensure accountability/progress is made with the money given to projects. I loved that the “Team Asha” program is one of the ways they raise donations to fund these valuable projects.

It has been an interesting journey so far and I'm not done yet. Race day is a month away. I am both nervous and excited for the big day. I am less nervous knowing that I will be joined by so many other wonderful Team Asha runners and that together we are raising money for such a worthwhile organization.

*April 2011,*

*Today I surprised myself. A lot! Before I go into that....*

*I am set to run my **1st half marathon** in June (Seattle Rock n' Roll). Unfortunately, I haven't run in the last month – zero, zilch, nada – as I've been nursing a pulled muscle. If I'm being honest, I've only managed a few miles over the last 2 months as I managed to pull it twice. So I've missed a lot of training time and had only made it up to ~3.5/4 miles.*

*The repeat injuries had me down & got me thinking there was no way I would be able to actually run the full race — and that was my goal, to run it. I even thought about throwing in the towel on the race altogether.*

My running group does their long runs on Sundays. So today, despite the fact that I'm still recovering from the flu, I got my sorry self out of bed. **Time to get back on the horse.** Coach, knowing I haven't been running, calmly reassured me that he can provide a training plan and I have enough weeks to still run the half. “Run? Really?!!!” **I was ecstatic!!** I couldn't believe **my dream was still possible!!!!**

Then he assigned me my goal miles for today: **5 miles.**

My heart skipped a beat when I heard him. **5? 5???** I've only ever run 5 miles once - in January. Quite possibly in my entire life. That one time was a fluke!! One of those rare days you feel so good that you feel like you could run forever. And that was when I was healthy too. Not when I was recovering from being sick AND not when I was coming back from an injury. All this went through my head in a split second. I never uttered a peep of complaint or exhibited any doubt.

**Okay. 5 miles it is!** I put on my headphones and just got to work. I counted my laps (1/2 mile = 1 lap), but I didn't think about the miles. I focused on the moment and the joy of running. I took notice of the beautiful park around me: the flowers that were starting to bloom, other runners, people with

dogs, and ducks happily foraging for food. I didn't worry about my time or "oh my god how am I going to survive running X more miles".

And I did it. I completed my miles. I wasn't dying; heck I wasn't even panting too hard. I felt like I could have even run further (although I was glad to stop at 5 miles for my hip.)

One of the miles was timed by the coach. I was expecting it to read ~13 min (touch slower than my norm of late). Nope! It was 11 min.

I surprised myself by being able to run the 5 miles. I surprised myself with an 11 min/mile. But today it was **about a larger moment** than that for me. I surprised myself by being **stronger** than I thought myself **possible of being**. As the laps ticked by, I thought: "**Wow - I can do this!!**" and by this I meant **the half-marathon**.

I tend to fight a nagging **core belief** that I am a weak person. However, usually once I set & focus-in on a specific goal I can just ignore it. I hadn't realized that this whole time I had believed I actually couldn't do it; that it wasn't possible for me to do it.

Today I got to feel the strength I have inside. I got a glimpse that I possess greater strength than I can imagine. **This IS possible!** I know the moment won't last but I'll try to carry it with me as long as I can. And in the meantime, I'll enjoy running. No matter what happens from here... :)

For those who can, please consider a donation to help the underprivileged. Running 13.1 miles is nothing compared to the struggles they face every day. I hope some of you will consider joining Team Asha. It doesn't matter your endurance level and you'll feel supported the whole way!!

Finally, whether you are a runner or not, I hope you might **come out on June 25th** to help cheer our runners on to the finish line!

### **Join Team Asha training runs:**

*Thursdays - 6:30 - 7:30 am at Soccer field @ Grass Lawn Park (7031 148th Ave NE, Redmond, WA)*

*Sundays - 8:00 am at Subway @ Marymoor Park (6046 West Lake Sammamish Parkway NE, Redmond, WA)*

## Geetanjali

The 8th edition of Asha Seattle's very own Tamil music concert, Geetanjali, was held on 9th April 2011 at Kane Hall in the University of Washington. Geetanjali is Puget Sound's best known Tamil music band that is composed of local musicians. The band performs for free and its members actively support Asha and other non-profits.



The band performing at Geetanjali 2011

The event was a smash hit - with over 650 people in attendance that danced to hit Tamil film songs. The event raised close to \$14,500. This year's show featured an orchestra &



School girls performing a dance number at Geetanjali

choreographed dances that were led by children! A CD autographed by A R Rahman was auctioned at this event. We'd like to thank our volunteers, the band, Junior Asha and Seattle Tamil Sangam for making this a grand success. Check out <http://www.geetanjali.net> to learn more about the band.

## EVENTS - Past and Future

- ◆ New Year-New You, Resolution run (Team Asha) — Jan 23
- ◆ Asha Seattle's 5K walk/10K bike social — Mar 13
- ◆ Geentanjali 2011 — April 09
- ◆ New Volunteer Orientation — May 03
- ◆ Food Sovereignty in the face of Globalization of hunger, a discussion with C.K. Ganguly — May 05
- ◆ Asha-20 Conference — May 28-30
- ◆ Rock 'n' Roll Marathon — June 25
- ◆ Seattle To Portland Bicycle Classic — July 9-10

**Asha for Education**

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*100% of your contribution goes towards Asha's projects in India. Your contribution is tax deductible.*

**To learn more join us at our bi-monthly meetings. All are Welcome!**

Our meetings typically occur on the first and third Wednesday of every month, at 7:30 pm, in the Lake Washington School District building, Redmond Town Center.

Please check [www.ashanet.org/seattle/resources/meetings/](http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/resources/meetings/) for any changes to meeting dates or location.

Contact Ken (206-491-4576), for meeting information.

For other requests and queries, please contact us at:

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**Phone: 425 890 8515**

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