

Asha for Education

Annual Report 1999



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*Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high;*

Where knowledge is free;

*Where the world has not been broken up
into fragments by narrow domestic walls;*

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

*Where the clear stream of reason has not lost
its way into the dreary sand of dead habit;*

*Where the mind is lead forward by thee
into ever-widening thought and action --*

*Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,
let my country awake.*

Rabindranath Tagore

Foreword

We have just completed one of the most amazing years in our long journey together. I wish to comment on our activities last year and emphasize what each of us must now do to keep moving forward. I also wish to convey the emerging consensus on the direction that we are to take as one team.

Going into 1999, we had more tasks on our agenda than ever before.

- Work-an-Hour 98, while successful, had tested the limits of our organization.
- We faced a sharp rise in the number of new chapter requests, volunteers, and projects.
- Our previous projects needed follow up work.
- Undaunted by the many challenges faced with Work-an-Hour 98, we were taking on many fundraisers, including Work-an-Hour 99.
- Asha India was expanding and mutual understanding was critical to keep pace with the momentum of the volunteers there.
- Asha 2000 preparations were also well underway.
- To speak and act as one team with one voice, our decision-making

processes had to be streamlined. Our long-term vision also needed crystallization.

All of these factors stretched our boundaries and challenged our abilities to work together as a team.

The Asha-wide conferences at Boston and Lucknow helped to address these challenges swiftly. First, a democratic, transparent, focus-group-based, decision making process has been successfully introduced for smoother operation. Second, to nurture progressive thoughts and facilitate bold new action, the development of the Asha Center in Lucknow was identified as a high priority. Third, we recognized the need for focus on the development of people, in addition to projects. Asha Fellowships are currently being established as a direct result of these conferences. Thanks to the collective volunteer efforts and enthusiasm of all participants, we will enter the millennium well equipped to stay on top.

Near term considerations

There is much work to be accomplished in order to continue shining. More of us need to take initiative and step up to Ashawide coordination responsibilities. We must recommit to execute brilliantly in each of our areas of responsibility. We must continue to reduce the turn around times in all our Asha activities. For example, we need to reach consensus within all focus groups and move forward quickly, reflecting our sense of urgency. We must also build strong bonds within the Asha family and go beyond e-mail relationships. Finally, and most importantly, each and every one of us needs to be involved directly, deeply, and meaningfully in at least one Asha project and work closely with our Asha-India counterparts.

Vision for the long haul

It is vitally important, starting now, that the work we do is meaningful to every child in India, even though at present we are intensely focused on select projects. Indeed, Asha with her great content of character, must be instrumental in reaching a national consensus for the construction of an educated nation within our lifetime. One such proposal is the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in India by August 15th, 2047. Its

central theme is to send every child, in every corner of India to school, and ensure that no child is left behind.

Looking ahead

Today, we are at a crucial point in our journey. We are about to complete 10 years of work together in the summer of 2001. This is a significant achievement that should be recognized, and plans have already begun for the 2001 Asha conference at UC Berkeley. This is also an opportunity for us to bring together Asha volunteers from every corner of the world to participate in the debate on the long-term vision of Asha including UPE 2047. We will work together to arrive at a clear understanding on milestones to reach along the way, as individuals and as a team.

Let us move forward together, letting future generations see that Asha for Education created a new nation of educated children, well-equipped to face the challenges and struggles of life ahead.

DP Prakash
President, Asha for Education,
1999

Introduction

Asha's mission is to support basic education for underprivileged children in India.

Asha for Education was founded in the summer of 1991 by University of Berkeley, California students, including Sandeep Pandey, Deepak Gupta and V.J.P. Srivastavoy. These individuals had a simple vision, which was to play a role in the development of India. They strongly believed that education is the critical requisite for bringing about social change in India. To achieve this goal, they focused their efforts on India's underprivileged children, the future of India. They named the group 'Asha', which means hope in many Indian languages, to signify the hope they wished to bring in the lives of India's children.

The objectives of Asha are:

- To provide education to underprivileged children in India
- To encourage the formation of various local groups that reach out to larger sections of the population
- To support and cooperate with persons and groups already engaged in similar activities
- To harness the required human and other resources to achieve the group's objectives
- To address, whenever possible, other socio-economic issues affecting human life such as health care, environment and women's issues

Thanks to many dedicated volunteers and the financial support of its donors, Asha has grown quickly over the past nine years to include over 35 chapters spread across the world. Its members carry out Asha's mission by encouraging the formation of local groups, both within India and abroad, in order to reach a vast cross-section of people. Asha also seeks to support and form associations with groups already engaged in the pursuit of similar goals. It acts as a lens, focusing the energy and funds from individuals based outside and within India, into action and results.

Asha volunteers in each chapter identify, research and raise financial support for education-oriented projects in India. Asha believes in giving its volunteers a high degree of freedom in initiating and realizing projects. To achieve these ends, it encourages cooperation between chapters by organizing national conferences, promoting focus groups across chapters, and implementing programs designed to maintain effective communication among its members.

...Asha has grown quickly over the past nine years to include over 35 chapters spread across the world.

Although our projects have touched the lives of thousands, there is still significant work ahead. There are millions of children in India who do not have access to basic education. By the year 2001, Asha plans to complete a comprehensive study on the impact of its projects. It is currently in the process of establishing goals for the next 10 and 50 years.

This annual report highlights the work of Asha's devoted volunteers, their plans for Asha's future and some of the projects that have benefited from Asha's assistance.

Asha for Education, along with the beneficiaries of our projects, would like to sincerely thank the many individuals, families and organizations that support our work and help us achieve our shared aspirations for a better India. ■

Projects

Although public education in India is supposedly free and available to all children, public schools cater mostly to the middle class. Children from poor families often cannot attend these schools for a myriad of reasons. Despite the fact that some schools do not charge tuition fees, the costs of uniforms, notebooks and pencils can be prohibitive to many. Others cannot attend because of poor accessibility of the schools (especially in remote areas). And, in some cases, caste barriers keep children of scheduled castes and tribes away from schools. Most middle class children, on the other hand, have the benefit of a more supportive educational environment: not having to do chores disruptive to studies, help with homework, special tutors, etc. And finally, many parents who have not attended school themselves, do not see the importance of education and are reluctant to send their children, especially girls, to school.

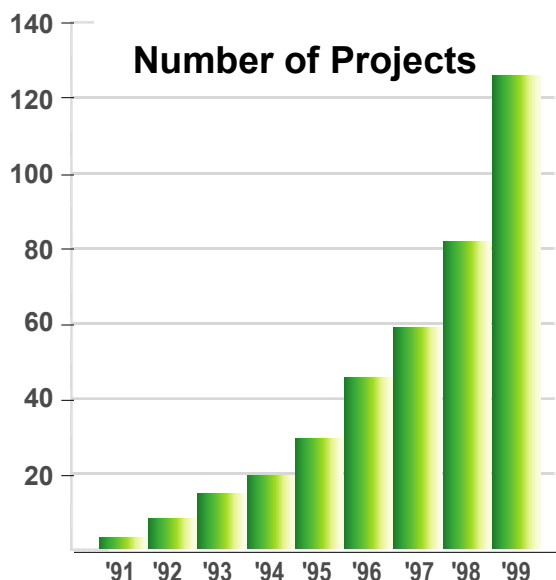
THE UNIQUENESS OF ASHA PROJECTS

Any effort to improve these children's predicament must address each aspect of the problem. The projects we fund attempt to do exactly this. They operate schools in rural areas where the need for education is most acute. They emphasize the education of girls and a few provide special facilities for disabled children. Uniforms are not required. Vocational training and the development of skills and crafts are emphasized. For example, children are taught to make paper, pottery, or other simple crafts for export to the United States and other countries. The proceeds from these projects help provide the financial support that the children often need, and also equip them with

invaluable skills for survival in the real world. Teachers are specially trained to serve the needs of poor children through coursework in basic hygiene and civic responsibilities. Day care centers are provided for young siblings of students, an important factor leading to higher enrollment for girls. In the end, it is hoped that these children will acquire both the skills to work in industry and the ethics to be a good citizen.

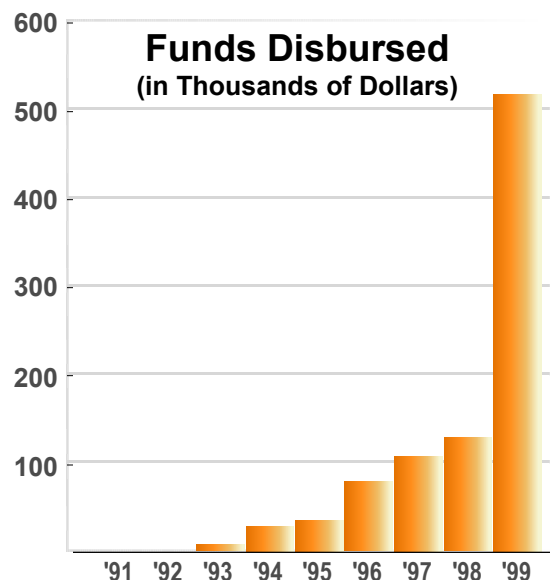
SELECTING ASHA PROJECTS

Asha fulfills its mission through non-profit organizations or individuals working in the field of education. Our policy is to work with non-sectarian groups having no religious or political affiliations, and which do not discriminate on the basis of caste, creed, religion or sex. These organizations and/or individuals must submit their proposal for funding to Asha and have at least one or more of the Asha chapters review them closely. The project proposal must describe the project in detail, including its objectives, action plan, number of children covered, number of people involved in the implementation of the project, an itemized



budget and any other relevant information. Asha generally looks for projects that are planned, managed and sustained by the group itself with little outside help. Another consideration is that the benefits of the project be fairly distributed and reach a maximum number of children.

Asha typically provides short-term support to projects and looks for an ability on the part of the



group to sustain the project beyond the period of Asha's assistance. A site-visit prior to or during the funding by one of the volunteers is required. Site-visits provide a first-hand appraisal of the situation, and help Asha make decisions regarding funding. In order to follow up on the projects it supports, Asha requires each group to provide regular financial and narrative reports, including pictorial documentation, if possible, on the progress of the project.

Asha currently supports over 125 projects from all over India and it has disbursed more than \$900,000 since its inception in 1991. Project selection is becoming more streamlined to ensure an efficient and effective disbursement of funds.

The Asha Stars Story

The Asha Star program began in 1995 with a small group of Asha-Los Angeles (Asha-LA) volunteers taking direct ownership of a project. It started in response to mounting concern regarding the transient presence of volunteers at a chapter, which made sustained impact very difficult; and placed too much responsibility on the remaining volunteers. Furthermore, a field trip to India and discussions with the project coordinators there showed that donors dropped out within two years when sustained volunteer involvement was lacking.

In order to address these problems, it was decided to form small groups of people who would take up the

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responsibility of ensuring the success of a particular project over the long-term. These people would be the Asha Stars for that project. Each Asha Star guarantees financial support of approximately \$300 per year towards their project, with the ultimate goal being to guide the project towards self-reliance.

Typically, Asha Stars operate in groups of five to ten people depending on the size of the project. As the teams are small, accountability is self-contained. Asha Stars are not confined by group meetings or their geographic location. Their commitment bridges the distance between them.

Projects are directed through the personal involvement of these teams in cooperation with volunteers in India. Each team has a coordinator who maintains detailed information about the project. Most coordinators visit their project sites periodically, keep the team well informed, seek input from teammates, and facilitate decision-making. Progress reports are posted on the web regularly, thus spreading awareness and enabling new volunteers to join the effort.

Within two years, forty Asha Stars emerged to support six out of eight Asha-LA projects, and this concept has subsequently spread to other chapters as well.

The Asha Star concept has proved to be extremely effective, as the progress of a project continues unhindered by the dynamic status of Asha volunteers. Also, since Asha-Stars have pledged to support their project for the length of the time agreed upon, these projects are free from the caprices of general fund-raising. Finally, the personal involvement of the people, and the sense of ownership that arises from it ensures greater commitment to the project. ■

spent the last 24 years of his life as a social worker for the Soliga tribal community. Beginning with curative medicine involving eradication of leprosy, treatment of sickle-cell anemia, tuberculosis etc, the project has expanded to include a general community health center, vocational training programs and a residential school for tribal children.

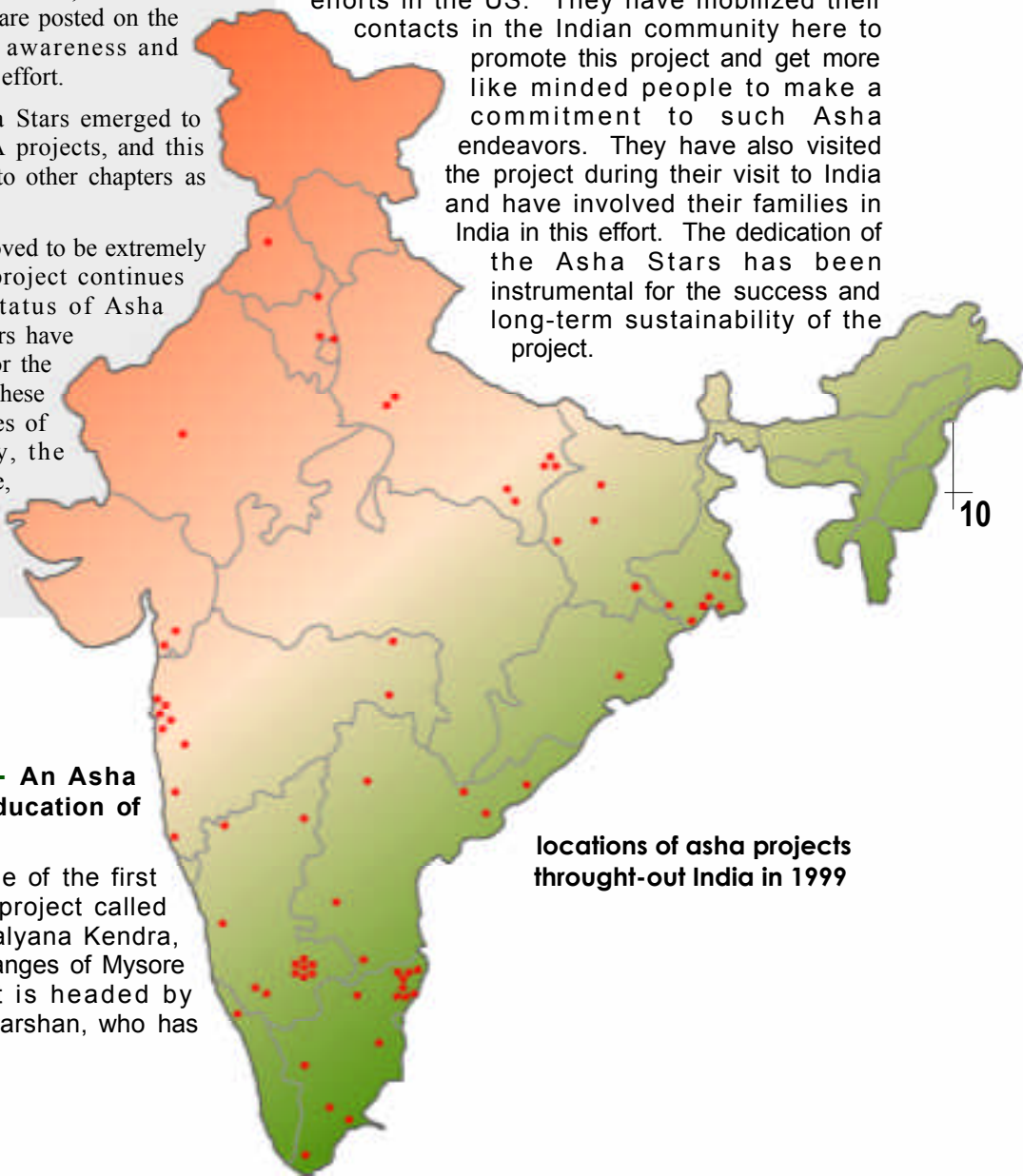
Asha-LA began its support for this project by aiding the school, particularly in the hiring of teachers. The Soliga community in the B.R. Hills ranges is distributed in remote hamlets in the forests and the issue was the education of children who were too young to attend the residential school. Asha-LA assisted in the hiring of teachers who would travel to the remote hamlets to teach these children. In addition to making the annual financial commitment, the five Asha-Stars involved with this project have also been instrumental in arranging public discussion and fund-raising efforts in the US. They have mobilized their

contacts in the Indian community here to promote this project and get more like minded people to make a commitment to such Asha endeavors. They have also visited the project during their visit to India and have involved their families in India in this effort. The dedication of the Asha Stars has been instrumental for the success and long-term sustainability of the project.

A GLIMPSE OF ASHA PROJECTS

Hope in the Hills - An Asha Stars project for the education of tribal children.

Hope in the Hills, one of the first Asha-Stars, supports a project called Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, located in the B. R. Hill ranges of Mysore district, Karnataka. It is headed by Padmashree Dr. H. Sudharshan, who has



locations of asha projects
throughout India in 1999

Akshar-ank Anubhav - A unique program for the education of street children.

Every morning, more than 250,000 of Mumbai's (Bombay) residents wake up on the hard concrete of a roadside, or the filthy floor of a



a class in progress at the bandra railway station

tin shack, only to find awaiting them, a day of shoe-shining, begging, or picking through heaps of garbage and fighting off stray dogs for valuable refuse. These are the street children of Mumbai.

Many of them live with one, or even both parents, but often these parents live off their children's incomes. In addition to the daily strife of survival, these children become easy targets of physical and sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation. Lacking proper guidance and protection, they often fall prey to a life of theft, alcohol and substance abuse.

Any solution to ameliorate the situation of street children would need to go beyond the superficial measures of doling out money or food to a begging child. Voluntary Organization in Community Enterprise (VOICE) is a non-governmental organization that has been working to help these children to break out of the shackles of dependency, poverty and exploitation. It was established in 1991 and its core members include development professionals, doctors and voluntary social workers. Since its inception, VOICE has focused on education, healthcare, public awareness, staff training and development of educational material. Classes are held by volunteers on various railway platforms where the children work, with a focus on teaching the children how to read and write, counseling them in matters

of hygiene and family related issues, and also encouraging them to join formal school.

Asha-St. Louis is working with VOICE by supporting the 'Akshar-Ank Anubhav' non-formal educational program at Bandra railway station that is tailored to the needs of street children – providing flexible hours, relevant curricula and vocational/skill training. The program is aimed at children between the ages of three and fourteen, who live and work on the railway platforms. Today, approximately 200 children are being educated under such programs and as a result of this interface, 125 are now enrolled in Municipal/Private schools. Asha St. Louis is committed to disbursing \$3,400 per annum for this project

Irula Project - Giving education to improve the community without eroding the native culture.

The Irula Project is located in eleven villages in Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu, near the Tamil Nadu- Andhra Pradesh border, and is managed by the Bharathi Trust, a non-profit development organization working for the upliftment and empowerment of the Irula Tribal communities living in the interior pockets of Thiruvallur district. Since 1990, it has been working among the Irula communities in more than sixty villages. It has been conducting a number of development programs, including awareness camps, liaison work with the government for obtaining development schemes, day care services, and motivational centers for the eradication of child labor. The Irulas face a high level of poverty and illiteracy, with almost 0% literacy in some villages.



special school for rice mill children in Kakkalur village

Their livelihood depends mainly on odd jobs like coolie work, rice milling, fishing, collecting firewood, and catching rats and snakes. Although they are recognized as a Scheduled Tribe and are eligible for benefits of reservation in education and jobs, many of them are unaware of their eligibility.

Irula children face severe challenges in attending school. They not only have to overcome cultural barriers in a community that does not traditionally send children to school, but the schools that are nearest to them are typically several kilometers away.

The current project involves the setting up of eight motivational centers in the villages. These centers equip children between the ages of five and fifteen to join the mainstream schooling process. In addition, they are working on bringing about a more lasting attitudinal change by inculcating the importance of education within the community, and ensuring that parents see the

benefits of continuing to educate their children. The budget requirement for the project is \$80,000 (~\$75 per child) and the project is expected to reach completion in about three years, when the children start attending government schools regularly. There are twenty teachers, mostly women from nearby villages, who have been trained to help the children in these centers. They try to ensure that the Irula culture and knowledge base is not lost in the process.

Asha volunteers are taking direct responsibility for the solutions in this project. We have ten people signed up to take ownership and make this project a success. A grant of \$13,000 has already been made, and more people are joining the effort with every passing day. Asha hopes that this project will result in a significant improvement in the lives of the nearly 550 Irula children who are benefiting from it. ■

Volunteers & Chapters

One of the great things about Asha for Education is its wide variety of chapters and volunteers. Each chapter is unique and volunteers bring their own set of perspectives and skills to Asha. The first chapter was formed in Berkeley, CA with only a handful of volunteers. Today you will find that Asha has not only spread throughout the US, but across the world. We currently have 33 chapters in the US, 7 chapters in India, and 3 newly formed international chapters. Thanks to e-mail and the internet, Asha has become a borderless organization with over 250 active volunteers across the world. Though Asha's growth over the last 9 years has been truly amazing, what lies ahead of us is even more exciting. With dedicated volunteers forming new chapters across the globe, who knows what is around the corner - with a little imagination one can picture Asha chapters in places as diverse as Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Montana, and Sweden!!

Asha is only as strong as its volunteers and chapters. This section of the annual report describes the responsibilities and issues that chapters face. Also included are summaries of the annual meetings held in India and the US in 1999. We hope this section will give you a glimpse of 'a day in the life of an Asha chapter'.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASHA CHAPTERS

While each Asha chapter is unique and can independently pursue its own vision, a common set of Asha principles binds all chapters. This results

Growing pains

Learning to reach a consensus

Decision-making within Asha has always been based on a consensus approach, with extensive volunteer involvement in discussions. However, as Asha grew and became greater than the sum of its parts, it was more and more cumbersome for hundreds of volunteers in the 35 chapters across the country to discuss issues and arrive at a consensus. Matters came to a head during the first all-chapter event, the 1998 Work an Hour. Each issue raised was discussed by volunteers in all chapters; it took us over six months to make a routine decision about disbursing funds to projects! Clearly, we needed to improve our decision-making process.

Focus Groups: a new way of making decisions

So how could we be efficient decision-makers while retaining Asha's culture of openness and volunteer involvement? The answer: **focus groups**, a decision making body comprising of volunteers interested in a particular issue. After the 1999 conference, the Focus Group focus group (not a typo!) devised a set of guidelines for such groups to work within Asha's framework. These rules and guidelines were drawn to enable efficient decision-making without being too restrictive, while being comprehensive enough to keep minimal control over the Focus Groups' actions and decisions.

The focus groups concept is built on Asha's tradition of openness and flexibility and has proved to be extremely effective. The 1999 Work an Hour event was a great success thanks to the efforts of volunteers who formed different groups to handle projects, publicity, and finances. On other fronts, the Fund Raising focus group and the E-commerce working group were formed to tackle various fund raising issues, such as online transactions through the internet and developing resources for local/national events, etc. The Projects working group and the Asha Stars group are working on developing the knowledge base of projects and social issues in India.

So far, focus groups have been extremely powerful in helping Asha volunteers make consensus based decisions. However, one of the challenges with this concept is that currently, most focus groups are comprised of volunteers who are active at an Asha-wide level. There is a concern that the increasing use of focus groups could lead to an ideological mismatch between the volunteers who are active at the chapter level and those who participate in Asha-wide decision-making. It is critical for us to prevent this separation by increasing the level of communication among volunteers. As an example, we are beginning to provide regular updates of focus group activities to all chapters and also striving to increase participation of chapter volunteers in focus groups. Constructive criticism to improve the functioning of our focus groups is always welcome! And yes, if required, we will form yet another focus group to continue to ensure that Asha is ready to face new challenges that lie ahead of us. ■

in a number of activities that are common across the chapters. Each chapter must have a chapter coordinator and a treasurer. Other than these 2 positions, each chapter is free to organize their chapter in whatever way they feel works with their own volunteers. Due to the non-hierarchical nature of Asha, each volunteer's opinion has equal weight, no matter what their 'title' is within the organization. Most chapters meet at least once a month, in addition to smaller meetings for projects, fundraising, etc.

The following examples help to bring these responsibilities to life:

Projects

One of the characteristics that makes Asha unique is that we are not only a fundraising organization, but we take an active role in identifying and monitoring the projects we fund. Many chapters have a separate projects group that meets regularly to research and discuss projects thoroughly. A visit to the Asha website offers a glimpse of the efforts made by Asha chapters to identify and support 125 projects in India benefitting thousands of children.

Fundraising

One of the ways that chapters express their creativity is through fundraising. This not only raises money but more importantly, increases awareness of Asha within the local community. Since 1991, Asha chapters raised nearly half-a-million dollars through a variety of fun and educational fund-raisers. Almost all Asha chapters hold some form of fundraising event annually. Some of the more recent examples include:

- NYC/NJ had 5 individuals run the grueling 27 mile NYC marathon to raise \$2400 (about \$100 per mile!).
- Asha St. Louis hosted *Tarang*, an annual event which included a carrom/TT/chess tournament and raised over \$8000.
- Asha Arizona showcased many aspects of Indian culture (dance, music, yoga, food) in *Glimpses of India* that raised over \$5000.
- Asha Dallas hosted *Spice Week* that involved several local restaurants donating a portion of their profits to Asha.

Asha-wide Activities

Aside from dealing with chapter specific issues, many Asha volunteers also participate in Asha-wide activities. Some of the key Asha-wide activities for 1999 included raising funds through Work an Hour, publishing the Asha calendar and newsletter, and organizing Asha-wide conferences in Boston and Lucknow. There are several Asha-wide focus groups that are open to any interested volunteer for participation and contribution. The focus groups discuss, debate, and make decisions on many aspects of Asha, such as, fundraising, projects, fellows, etc. These focus groups illustrate how the initiative of a few people can lead to implementation of bold, new ideas. *(please see text inset on pg. 14 for more information about the activities of focus groups)*

Another great way for chapters to contribute is to get involved with Asha merchandise. Several

chapters have worked together to create Asha calendars, t-shirts, mugs, cards, etc. People are constantly impressed by the quality and creativity shown in developing this merchandise. Asha volunteers continue to use innovative ideas for fundraising. A recent proposal is being considered for members to bike from San Francisco to Washington DC to raise money for Asha!!

ASHA INDIA CHAPTERS

While chapters outside India carefully evaluate projects and take ownership, chapters within India are able to do this on a much larger scale. Due to the close collaboration of Asha India chapters with chapters outside India, the volunteers in India are

Taking Root The Asha Ashram

It is a well-known fact that education is not imparted in a vacuum. The success of any education program depends on the social and economic environment surrounding it. When Sandeep Pandey, one of the founding members of Asha, settled in a village in Ballia to work towards providing basic education for underprivileged children, he discovered that an even bigger problem in the area was youth employment. Not only was it leading to high-unemployment related problems, it was also discouraging young children from attending school because the usefulness of education in securing a source of livelihood was unclear. While investigating the root cause of this problem, Sandeep started questioning the current education system. What should be the purpose of a good education system? What topics should be taught in school? Is the current system performing well against this standard? From this investigation, the idea of an Asha Center was born, which was later renamed Asha Ashram. The objective of the Asha Ashram is to work for social change based on a philosophy of education that aims to:

- Inculcate human values for a just human order
- Impart skills which will help an individual become self-reliant when he/she grows up.

The Asha Ashram is situated in Lalpur-Banjra village, 60 kilometers from the city of Lucknow. The village is home to roughly 40 families of Arakh and Raidas communities, the latter being Scheduled Caste. Once the center is complete, about ten of these families will live in the center and be responsible for its operation. In addition to hosting children's classes, the school building will act as the community center, a meeting place for women's groups and village committees, and will facilitate knowledge sharing among non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There are no employees in the Ashram and the residents take care of all chores. In addition, the villagers help sustain the Ashram activities through donations in kind e.g. labor or food grains.

'E' is for Education

The education system is based on Gandhian principles and students are not charged any tuition fee. The focus is on imparting practical skills through activity based learning. The children spend 1-2 hours each day learning reading, writing, arithmetic, sciences and social sciences. They make arts & crafts, science models and toys from inexpensive locally available materials, and learn music and traditional arts from local artisans. The children also participate in several cottage industries organized in the Ashram, such as, bee-

keeping, farming, nursery, fruit gardens, dairy, medicinal plants and food processing (chyawanprash making).

The center is developing new a curriculum and teaching methods. It is publishing a series of textbooks, the first of which is already complete. A book on health care for primary level students is in progress, and so is a collection of songs and stories. A good documentation center supported by a well stocked library is also planned.

Though barely a year old with construction still in progress, several classes have already been held at the center. The process of education has begun without any classrooms or blackboards. The children's first lesson was on solar energy. Most of the villagers got to see for the first time a solar lantern and a solar cooker. They were surprised that food could be cooked without lighting fire or worrying about smoke. That night, the villagers sat around the solar lantern and discussed the possibility of using solar energy to light the entire village. They also discussed the potential for using bio-gas as an energy source.

In their next school session, the children learnt counting using tiny clay balls (the size of marbles) which they had themselves prepared. The children also brought beautifully colored toys made of clay, exercising their creativity and imagination to the most.

The children play soccer before the

classes begin and do origami to develop dexterity of their fingers. The kids are so enthusiastic about this "school" that they even bring their little brothers and sisters with them. Sometimes the elders stand and observe, often joining in the fun or helping the teachers. They are all fascinated with the school sessions and look forward to the next time.

On the 14th and 15th of June 2000, the first teachers' training program was held at the Ashram. The objective of the training program was to reinforce the Gandhian philosophy of education, explore various ways of making the exercise of education an enjoyable experience for the children and do some evaluation and introspection. Teachers from Asha's projects in the Lucknow area spent the two days learning, sharing and having fun. Most of the teachers found this training program quite valuable and suggested that the training become a regular part of their work. Later on, teachers from other Asha supported projects could also be invited.

Innovative building technologies

New ideas require new solutions. The Asha center is being built using a ferro-cement technology developed by Ashok Kumar Jain (M.Tech., IIT Kanpur) who was inspired by his father to learn and develop practical engineering techniques. Ferro-cement is essentially a coating of mortar, made of one portion cement and three portions of coarse sand (morang), on both sides of an iron mesh. By bending the iron cables and mesh, any shape can be achieved. The application of mortar on both sides of this mesh renders the structure water resistant. The ferro-

cement technology uses roughly half the energy as conventional construction. Because the construction is modular, it offers the ability to dismantle an entire structure and re-assemble it at a different location. Ashok wants to train interested local youth in this technology. As a result of its use in the Center construction, people in the area have become curious about this new technology and a number of them are interested in learning and using it.

Affordable health care

The first health camp was organized in March 2000 with Professor Ramakant, a surgeon from Lucknow Medical College. More than 125 patients, some from neighboring villages, got themselves examined. Water borne diseases and protein-vitamin deficiencies were the most common. Unfortunately, the benefit of the health camp was limited because most of the prescribed medicines were either not available locally or were too costly. The villagers can only afford natural, ayurvedic and homeopathic medicines. Dr. Kusum Singh, C.M.O. at a Lucknow charitable hospital, has decided to visit the village once a month and offer homeopathic treatment. The Ashram now stocks homeopathic medicines for the villagers.

Community leadership

Right from its inception, the Asha Ashram is involving the local community in the decision-making process. A village committee has been formed, consisting of at least one member of each household in every meeting. However, due to different responsibilities of men and women, their availability for meetings is different (evenings

for men, and daytime for women). Therefore, a separate group is being formed for the women, which will take the form of a self-help group.

The Ashram has rented 2.5 acres of land for agriculture. The village committee decided that the two most underprivileged families be given this land on a sharecropping arrangement. They also decided the location of the hand-pump to be installed on the Ashram campus to suit their and the general public's convenience. Furthermore, they also put forth valuable advice on water management for a pond next to the Ashram land. The committee has also begun to resolve land-disputes and other local conflicts, which previously resulted in unnecessary expenses or led to violence.

Future growth

Though the Ashram construction was delayed due to harvesting season and the rains, the central building and a bio-gas plant is taking form. The Ashram is considering establishing a revolving fund, for use by the families that are in need of critical assistance. The fund could be endowed either by the Center or through contributions from the villagers themselves.

The Lalpur experiment in primary education by Asha has thus begun a learning process to which the entire village is witness. As the experiment evolves, the villagers are rediscovering many aspects of their life from housing to energy, agriculture to health and education to income generation. After all, education is nothing but a process of learning. And what better subjects to learn about than the ones that directly affect our lives! ■

able to focus almost all of their time to projects and directional issues, rather than on fundraising. Asha India volunteers are the eyes and ears of the worldwide team and are there to see firsthand, the changes and impact that Asha is having. They are also able to see its shortcomings, thus guiding the new directions that Asha should take.

Asha India hosted its first nationwide meeting in Lucknow in December, 1999 to discuss the focus and direction of chapters in India. The Lucknow meeting was a very productive and successful event. About 15 to 20 groups all over India attended the two-day workshop and shared their experiences, successes and concerns. Active Asha volunteers met on the third day for a

discussion about Asha Center and the future priorities for Asha India., some of which are:

- To build the first Asha base near Lucknow which will encompass not only Asha workers but also the entire neighboring village community. This will serve as a living example of Asha's ideology.
- Building real life centers of self-reliance where people can come to learn and train themselves in areas, such as, beekeeping, block/screen printing, weaving, and ayurvedic products.
- To work with projects and individuals of high quality. This means Asha's project review process

should be revisited and critically examined.

- Documentation of work done in Asha's projects as well as in other exemplary alternative education models.

From the summary of the India meeting, one can truly see that Asha is only as strong as its India chapters. Without their firsthand experience and guidance, volunteers outside India would have a difficult time evaluating Asha's success and determining its future. Over the next few years we aspire to further strengthen the working relationship between Asha world-wide chapters and Asha India.

NEW CHAPTERS AND NEW CHALLENGES

In the past year Asha has seen growth in its numbers with new chapters starting in Minnesota, Michigan, Florida, Georgia, California, Nebraska, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. In addition there are 3 international chapters that have started in Canada, Australia and England. While this growth is very exciting, it also presents challenges. One of these challenges is to help new chapters form and keep them motivated to develop into strong and

productive chapters. In the past year we have implemented the chapter mentor concept, where a new chapter is paired with 1 or 2 existing chapters. With this program, new chapters can feel free to contact their mentors at any time for help and ideas on how to run their chapter. This has been well received by both new and existing chapters, and also has created new connections among chapters.

1999 ASHA-WIDE CONFERENCE

Asha's phenomenal growth over the past two years necessitated an all-chapter meeting to discuss various issues. Asha MIT hosted the 2nd Asha-wide conference in May, 1999. The conference was attended by 60 volunteers (40 from outside Boston!) representing 16 chapters. The volunteers greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet face-to-face and to critically evaluate issues pertinent to Asha. The key lessons and aspirations from the conference are summarized below:

- **Growing in strength:** Presentations by 16 chapters covering their major accomplishments and concerns revealed that although the chapters



holding the asha banner aloft at the India Day parade in New York city

were varied in terms of size and age, they were facing many common issues (e.g. volunteer attrition, transferring knowledge to new volunteers). These issues were covered in a set of mini-workshops, which led to the formation of teams working on coordination among chapters, fundraising, web and finance. These teams have compiled a list of "do's and don'ts" to help streamline chapter operations.

- **Working together:** The recent increase in national level activities is bringing all Asha chapters closer together. It is also providing a motivation to refine our decision-making process at the national level. A small team of volunteers is working to establish efficient decision-making processes while retaining Asha's framework of open discussion and non-hierarchy.

- **Asha 2000:** After completing his studies in the US in 1999, Shanmuga (Asha Princeton) has returned to India to spend the year 2000 traveling across the country visiting the various NGOs supported by Asha. The goal is to provide:

- An in-depth analysis of the projects supported by Asha
- A comparative study of projects
- A measure of Asha's impact over the past 10 years
- Better understanding of issues faced by the NGOs

- **New vision for projects:** Venu Govindu started off the session on 'Asha Roadmap' with the message that Asha should strive to be more than a service provider and aim towards a deeper relationship with our projects. After hours of

discussions, volunteers compiled a list of what they would like to see in an ideal project. Some of the innovative criteria for selecting projects include; education as a part of community development; utilizing and improving upon the existing formal education system; self-sufficiency; emphasis on educating girls; and projects with clear financial accountability.

- **Asha Fellows:** Volunteers are evaluating a promising new initiative; an 'Asha Fellows' program to provide financial and moral support to individuals interested in social work in India. We are learning about other organizations' programs to decide on the best implementation model for Asha. A focus group has been created to develop criteria for selecting the fellows and ensuring required support to them.

The conference ended on a high note with Dr. Parameswar Rao's moving and thought provoking speech. Dr. Rao left the US after finishing his Ph.D. and has since spent all his time transforming a small village in India. His speech moved many volunteers to tears and helped us to see more clearly, the tremendous challenge ahead of us. On the whole, the conference achieved its purpose; passionate volunteers from across the country met face to face and exchanged views. Having synched up and recharged, the Asha community is well set for the next millennium!

WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR ASHA CHAPTERS

As you can see, exciting things are happening to Asha. New volunteers are joining almost everyday across the world, bringing new and innovative ideas to the group. New chapters are popping up in many corners of the world almost on a monthly basis. Our dedicated volunteers and chapters will continue to work hard until every child in India achieves the life they desire and deserve. ■



at the 1999 Asha conference hosted by our MIT chapter

Asha and the Web

If any one thing has been responsible for the spread of Asha throughout the world, it is the internet. The Asha website, www.ashanet.org, has been instrumental in almost every aspect of our functioning. From its roots as a small mailing list for three Berkeley volunteers, the website now receives an average of 4,100 unique visitors per month. On the main page you will find a wealth of information including links to our chapters worldwide, detailed information on projects, ways to donate, and Asha merchandise. Over the last several years, the web has greatly changed the way we communicate, raise funds, and publicize. Perhaps the best example of this has been its use in our yearly fundraiser, Work an Hour:

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WORK AN HOUR '99

Six weeks, 1167 pledges and over \$55,000 raised; Work an Hour '99 was a phenomenal success! The Work an Hour (WAH) team built on WAH 98's accomplishments and blew past the goal of raising \$40,000 by August 16th, 1999. The website was almost single-handedly responsible for this success. Ramu (Asha-St. Louis) and Shailen (Asha-Berkeley) cranked away for several nights to iron out all the kinks, and launched the website at 4 AM on July 4th, 1999. And what a site it was! Attention grabbing graphics, detailed information about the projects, a host of publicity material, donor statistics, chapter-wise break up of pledges - you name it, it was there.

Once the website was up, Neeta (Asha-Seattle) started the publicity working group. WAH coordinators from different chapters stepped forward to join the virtual group. Within a few days, volunteers developed the publicity material (posters, banners, a press release, and TV/radio ads), all on the

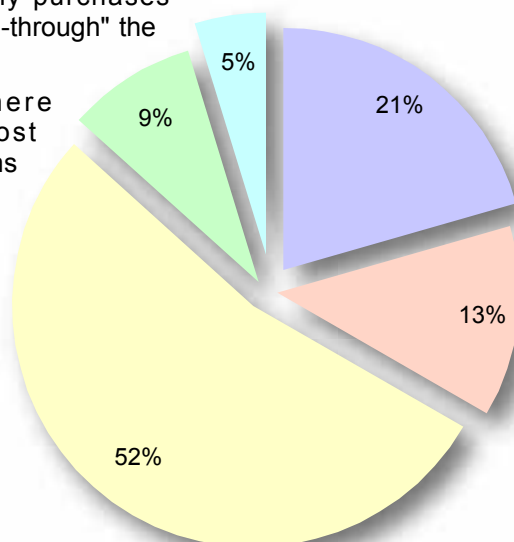
web. The website was the glue that held it all together. The banners placed on various websites were especially helpful in attracting online traffic to the WAH home page. The chapter pledge meter that was updated with each pledge, brought out the competitive spirit of the volunteers and chapters to perform to the best of their abilities. Work an Hour '99 proved yet again that Asha, with its dedicated and spirited volunteers (and a lot of help from the web!) can and will achieve wonders. Work an Hour 2000 here we come!!

E-COMMERCE

Asha has kept pace with modern technology in many ways, including its use of e-commerce. With little effort, people can donate to Asha without spending a penny from their own pocket! Most online stores have affiliate or associate programs where the partner will get a certain amount of commission for any purchases made while "clicking-through" the partner's website

The graph here illustrates our most successful programs and the funds they generated in 1999.

To put this in



Income from web affiliate programs



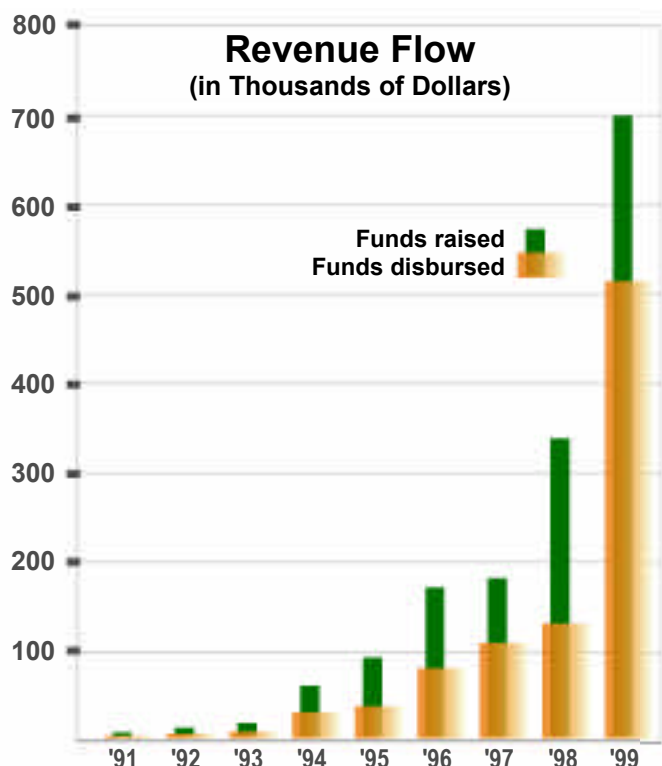
perspective, a total of \$1516 was raised through this method in 1999. At a cost of \$15 per year to educate a child in India, 101 children are now receiving an education as a result of Asha's e-commerce programs and this is just the beginning. Asha as an organization has just scratched the surface of the potential available to us for raising funds through the Internet.

Another exciting accomplishment in 1999 was the achievement of on-line credit card donations through All Charities. This is the beginning of a new way to raise funds and will greatly simplify the donation process and make WAH 2000 even more successful.

From the examples above, it is obvious that the web is essential for the future of Asha. It will help in spreading the vision of Asha across the world and will serve as a vital link allowing all the volunteers to work together to achieve our ambitious plans for the future.■

Financial Report

Fundraising is one of the key activities of Asha. In 1999 alone, we raised over \$700,000. Since all administrative costs are borne by Asha members, 100 percent of funds raised through general donations will go directly towards our projects. In 1999, over \$500,000 was disbursed to about 125 projects.

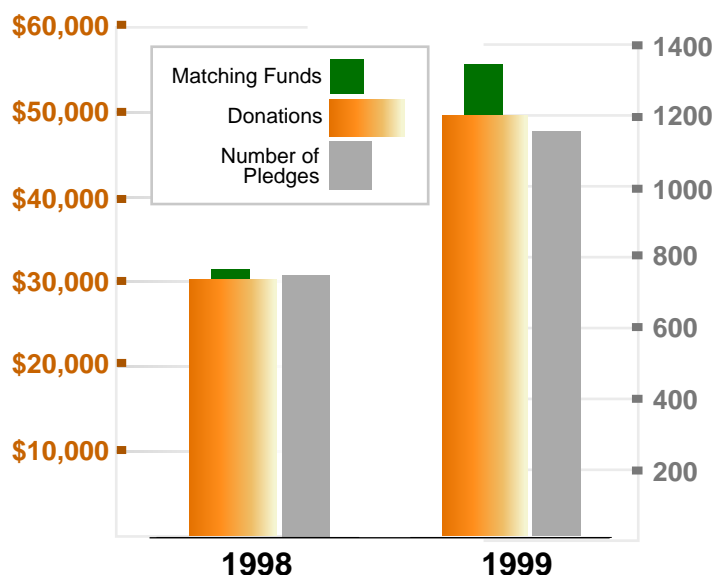


Sandeep Pandey, one of the founders of Asha, contributed our very first donation of \$40 in 1991. Before the year was over, we had already raised \$3000 from many individuals, with an average contribution of \$10-\$15. Since then, the average size of our donations has increased significantly although ninety eight percent of our contributions still come from individuals. Recently, we have increased our corporate fundraising efforts in order to tap in to the large funds available from many corporations.

Some of the main reasons for our phenomenal growth are:

- A significant increase in the number of chapters and volunteers has resulted in giving Asha greater visibility among the local communities and has led to a substantial increase in the donor base
- The Work an Hour (WAH) program initiated in 1998 has met with tremendous success. WAH was instrumental in raising \$30,000 and \$55,000,

Work an Hour



respectively in 1998 and 1999

As a result of the growth in revenues, the grants paid out to the projects has also been steadily increasing. Compared to \$2000 in 1991, and \$37,000 in 1995, Asha disbursed \$510,000 to projects in 1999.

Asha's grant ratio measures the percentage of funds sent to the projects in a given year as a proportion of the total revenues for that year. Asha For Education aims to keep this ratio as high as possible. As is evident from the above graph, this ratio was increased steadily over the years until

1998 when it fell from 60% to 39%. Recognising this disturbing development, we streamlined our procedures while maintaining the high quality of our projects. The impact of this effort is clearly visible in our financials this year, which show a grant ratio of over 70%.

In 1998, we launched our annual worldwide fundraiser Work an Hour. Every year, on August 15th, India's Independence Day, we invite people from all over the world to donate one hour of their income towards children's education projects in India. The campaign has been very successful. In 1998, about 750 people pledged \$31,000 towards three Work an Hour projects. In 1999, over 1150 people contributed \$54,000 towards four Work an Hour projects. As a result, Asha is able to support projects which can have a larger impact on whole communities.

Work an Hour also gives our donors the chance to symbolically come together in this worldwide effort. While all of our other fundraisers are held and managed locally, this is the only Asha fundraiser that is conducted in a global scale. It is a major undertaking for us. Hundreds of volunteers spend countless hours planning the event, selecting good quality projects, designing the website, troubleshooting programming glitches, sending out press-releases, making short-films and audio advertisements, and processing donations. We estimate that about 100 volunteers put in a total of 5,000 hours on this event alone. No wonder then, that people who participate in this event, have so many positive things to say. They like being part of a worldwide team of people who are working towards positive change.

CONSOLIDATED FINANCIALS

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Fiscal Year	1998	1999
Revenues		
Direct public support	473,205	554,536
Indirect public support	4,117	8,253
Investment Income	2,101	13,287
Net income from special events and activities	54,096	112,911
Gross profit from sales of merchandise	14,554	14,475
Other revenues	0	3,901
Total Revenues	548,073	707,363
Expenses		
Projects Supported	122,876	514,159
Publicity Expenses Paid by Sponsors	1,216	13,416
Other expenses	0	6,070*
Total Expenses	124,092	533,645
Net	423,981	173,718

* - For calendar printing. Note: 100 % of the donations to Asha go directly to projects and all administrative expenses are borne by volunteers.

LOCAL EVENTS

As large as the Work an Hour campaign is, it contributes less than 10% of our annual budget. Most of the funds are raised by Asha chapters through local events and publicity campaigns. This tradition was started back in 1991 with Asha's first ever fundraiser *Images of India*, an evening of music and dances from India performed by local talented artists, most of whom were students at University of California at Berkeley. Since then Berkeley and all other chapters of Asha have established their own unique shows and events which bring in funds and raise awareness about

Asha and children's education issues in the local community. In addition to cultural shows, our chapter volunteers host movie screenings, cricket matches, booths at local functions and, even run in marathons!

Merchandise sales have become a strong component of Asha fundraising, contributing over \$15,000 in project funds. We sell calendars, greeting cards, stationary, ceramic mugs, t-shirts and clay diya-candles, among other items. Asha calendars are very popular among the non-resident Indian population since they are attractively designed and feature both Indian and US holidays. In 1999 we sold close to 4,000 calendars in the US. ■

appendix A - 1999 project list

Arizona	
Abhiyan	\$5,300
Ankuran	\$6,500
Asha For Education (Kanpur)	\$1,500
MSMF	\$2,350
PATS Ragavendra Primary School	\$1,100
Rotary District 5510 (Handicapped special school)	\$1,000
Rotary District 5510 (Mentally retarded children)	\$903
Sai Kripa	\$1,800
Sumavanam	\$900
Swami Vivekananda Educational Society	\$1,000
Total	\$22,353

Berkeley	
Abilities	\$3,010
Cheetah Camp Project	\$1,000
Holy Mother Trust	\$2,250
Jhansi Project	\$1,850
Little Stars School	\$6,440
MSE Trust	\$1,200
Nellai	\$1,700
Sarvodaya Parivar Trust	\$4,000
SEED Project	\$800
Support-A-Child	\$2,190
VESC Project	\$4,000
Total	\$28,440

Chicago	
Ashraya	\$600
MVF	\$500
Sevalaya	\$2,500
Total	\$3,600

Cleveland	
AIWC Central Calcutta Constituency Creche	\$1,000
Belighata Primary Section of AIWC	\$250
Kalighat	\$1,500
Total	\$2,750

Colorado	
Jyothi Nilayam	\$2,100
Total	\$2,100

Cornell	
Asha-India	\$200
Bal Niketan	\$500
MVF	\$500
Rahul Multidisciplinary Research Center	\$700
Remote School Project – Sarvodaya Parivar Trust	\$925
School for Mentally Handicapped children	\$500
Thulir Project	\$500
TNSF Project	\$1,000
Voice	\$1,000
Total	\$5,825

Corvallis	
M. P. Elementary School	\$1,436
Total	\$1,436

DC	
Ballia	\$3,000
Nalamdana	\$1,300
Phulenagar	\$2,500
Total	\$6,800

Detroit	
Desphande Tribal School/Hostel	\$150
Hosur Project	\$980
Naveen Samartha Vidyalaya	\$250
Total	\$1,380

Indiana	
Project Bisauli	\$5,000
Project Katha- II	\$2,000
Project Prakash	\$2,500
Total	\$9,500

Irvine	
Seva Nilayam	\$600
Total	\$600

Kentucky	
Nalamdana	\$400
Total	\$400

Los Angeles	
Bridge the Gap	\$1,800
CINI	\$3,330
Helping Hands	\$2,300
Right Livelihood	\$4,948
Rise and Shine	\$1,500
Self-Reliance	\$1,500
Street to School	\$3,000
Youth Dreams	\$1,500
Total	\$19,878

Madison	
Little Stars School, Varanasi	\$2,000
Share and Care Foundation (for Swanirwar)	\$1,000
Total	\$3,000

MIT	
AFF - Kanpur Project	\$10,000
Asha 2000	\$1,200
Asha Center	\$10,000
Asha India	\$800
Asha	\$10,000
Bhoomiheen Seva Samiti	\$1,750
Dr. MVR Prathamika Patasala	\$2,700
Jeevanganodaya School	\$4,650
Sahnivasa	\$2,000
Samuha	\$1,000
Sarvodaya – Pindval	\$2,400
SLADS - Singhbhum Legal Aid Development Society	\$2,380
SODWAC	\$500
Sweekar	\$3,000
TamilNadu Science Forum	\$1,155
UDAVI	\$1,250
VISA - Village Improvement & Service Assoc.	\$3,750
VOICE	\$2,300
Voice of People	\$3,000
Total	\$63,835

NYC/NJ	
Bustee Welfare Center	\$1,700
CINI Project	\$3,000
Little Stars School	\$1,283
Nandgad Project	\$13,500
Navjyoti Swawalamban Sewa Sansthan	\$600
Pratham	\$400
Sarda Kalyan Bhandar (SKB)	\$5,000
Timbaktu Collective	\$5,250
Udbhas Project	\$7,000
Vanavasi Ashram	\$2,000
Total	\$39,733

Princeton	
FODRA	\$1,000
Nalamdana	\$2,800
PACHE	\$600
Vasundhara	\$6,000
Total	\$10,400

South East Florida	
Chetanaa	\$250
Manav Sanskar Kendra	\$1,000
Total	\$1,250

St. Louis	
KFI	\$1,700
VOICE	\$3,400
Total	\$5,100

Seattle	
Anugriha	\$3,000
Asha 2000	\$1,000
Bhoomi Heen Sewa Samithi	\$9,300
Champa Mahila Society (School + Orphanage)	\$8,800
Chetanaa	\$1,000
Christ King Society	\$5,000
Digantar	\$3,000
Each One Teach One	\$1,080
Jnana Prabodhini (Prachiti)	\$1,900
Little Stars School	\$5,000
Lodhar Project	\$2,058
LRG English School	\$1,680
Maharogi Sewa Samithi (Anandwan)	\$15,000
Malleshwaram Shishu Vihar	\$1,000
National Association for the Blind	\$1,020
Rashtra Nirman Vidya Vikas Trust	\$1,250
REDAG Project	\$500
RHEDT Project	\$7,200
Seva Bharathi Project	\$2,500
Spastics Society of India (Vidyasagar)	\$15,121
Spastics Society of Karnataka	\$3,000
SSUP	\$2,500
SUPPORT	\$4,000
Udhavum Karangal	\$217
Valluvur Gurukulam	\$4,000
Total	\$100,126

Silicon Valley	
Alternative for India Development	\$3,200
Asha 2000	\$2,560
AVEHI Abacus	\$10,000
CDDP	\$15,000
GB School	\$2,400
Gram Vikas	\$55,173
Him Darshan Kutir	\$4,100
Jnana Prabodhini	\$2,400
Kambhapatti Foundation	\$10,000
Laubach Literacy	\$3,000
Pathri Project	\$7,300
Sarvodaya Vidyalaya	\$2,000
Vanasthali	\$3,000
Vidya Project	\$4,000
Total	\$124,133

Syracuse	
Red Cross	\$600
Saraswati Anath Ashram	\$1,500
St. Gregorios Balagram	\$500
Total	\$2,600

Urbana Champaign	
Balanand	\$1,030
Saathi	\$1,768
Sevalaya	\$470
Vivekananda Ashram	\$1,260
Total	\$4,528

Yale	
Child Welfare Project	\$1,000
Total	\$1,000

Work an Hour 1999	
Bhoomi Heen Sewa Samithi	\$10,000
Maharogi Sewa Samithi (Anandwan)	\$10,000
Sri Ramakrishna Seva Nilayam	\$20,000
VESC	\$10,000
Total	\$50,000

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