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Letter from President

Binay Pathak, President, Asha for Education

I am excited to share with you a glimpse of Asha for Education in 2019. In 2019, we moved the needle in a positive direction, in every aspect of our organization.

We had an excellent Asha-28 conference in Chicago, with one of the highest levels of participation by chapters attending physically or virtually. We are already bringing in many changes that were identified at the conference, including a monthly project talk series and a new volunteer coordination team. We are seeing a surge in volunteer engagement and organizational synergy, with our cross-chapter townhall meetings being attended at record levels and the biggest group of volunteers in our history stepping up to join our central coordination team for the 2020-2022 term.

Our renewed focus on fundraising has helped us raise a record $3.2MM from contributions and special events, which is $430K higher than we had raised in our previous year. Also, we have brought our working capital ratio (WCR) down to 1.5, which puts us in a more optimal place as we aim to balance a crucial time for donations to help our beneficiaries with the risk of a difficult fundraising year. We saw strong engagement from project partners, with 29 applications submitted for our Innovative and Scalable Projects (ISP) initiative, in which we identified projects that could grow fast and expand their impact. We allocated $100K to the three ISP winners and have been watching their success from the sidelines ever since. Our financial and organizational discipline is not only attested by our external and internal auditors, but also recognized by organizations like Charity Navigator, which has provided us with a 4-star rating for many years in a row.
"OUR FINANCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DISCIPLINE IS... RECOGNIZED BY CHARITY NAVIGATOR, WHICH HAS PROVIDED US WITH A 4-STAR RATING"

As I look forward to 2020, I am optimistic about building on the current organizational momentum, but also aware that COVID-19 is bringing one of the biggest challenges that Asha has ever faced. On one side, our project partners need even more support given the unique challenges that the lockdown throws at the communities they support. On the other side, we expect a significant impact to our fundraising as our patrons are potentially affected by difficult economic circumstances and as we face the inability to hold physical fundraising events during lockdown periods. My request to all readers is to please consider supporting Asha during this time, if you are able to, so that we don’t need to cut support for our projects at the worst possible time.

In our 2019 Annual Report, we aim to bring you a 360 degree view of our Asha world. I request that you take some time to read through the stories of our projects, donors, volunteers and evolving youth wings of our Asha chapters.

Let me take this opportunity to sincerely thank everyone who has supported Asha directly or indirectly, financially or through dedicating their personal time. As an Asha family, we have been supporting the community for 29 years and there is so much more work still to be done. We appreciate your continued commitment to helping us support the underprivileged communities in India and be an inspiration to others.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly at president@ashanet.org with your thoughts and feedback.

Stay safe,

Binay Pathak
President, Asha for Education
Email: president@ashanet.org
02

About Us

Our Mission

TO CATALYZE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE IN INDIA THROUGH THE EDUCATION OF UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN

Our Objectives

Asha for Education is a secular organization dedicated to change in India by focusing on basic education in the belief that education is a critical requisite for socio-economic change. In keeping with this focus, our volunteers are involved with and support projects that are secular and have an education-related component to them. The objectives of this group are:

- To provide education to underprivileged children in India.
- To encourage the formation of various local groups across the world to reach out to larger sections of the population.
- To support and cooperate with persons and groups already engaged in similar activities.
- To raise the required human and other resources to achieve the group objectives.
- To provide opportunities to individuals living outside India who wish to participate in Asha activities in India.
- To address, whenever possible, other issues affecting human life such as health care, environment, socio-economic aspects and women’s issues.

Our Board of Directors

President: Binay Pathak (president@ashanet.org)
Secretary: Snetu Karania (secretary@ashanet.org)
Treasurer: Uttaraa Diwan Talwar (treasurer@ashanet.org)
Projects: Anuradha Bulusu (projects@ashanet.org)
Fundraising: Anish Mukherjee (fundraising@ashanet.org)
Web: Prema Grandhi (webmaster@ashanet.org)

Contact us at info@ashanet.org
### ASSETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and Equivalents</td>
<td>$2,335,630</td>
<td>$1,807,380</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>3,258,160</td>
<td>3,664,163</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions Receivable</td>
<td>286,282</td>
<td>449,043</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Receivables &amp; Prepaid Expenses</td>
<td>10,231</td>
<td>13,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL ASSETS</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,890,303</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,933,745</strong></td>
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</table>

### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts Payable</td>
<td>$6,188</td>
<td>$19,196</td>
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**Net Assets:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
<td>$5,364,336</td>
<td>$5,256,596</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporarily Restricted</td>
<td>$519,779</td>
<td>$657,953</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Net Assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,884,115</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,914,549</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$5,890,303</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,933,745</strong></td>
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### Revenue and Support

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>$3,109,256</td>
<td>$2,474,790</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>117,335</td>
<td>316,868</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donated Services</td>
<td>171,713</td>
<td>172,736</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest Income</td>
<td>68,817</td>
<td>76,858</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realized/Unrealized Loss on Investments</td>
<td>88,869</td>
<td>(43,174)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL REVENUE + SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,555,990</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,000,078</strong></td>
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### Expenses

<table>
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<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Services</td>
<td>$2,273,490</td>
<td>$3,622,843</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management + General</td>
<td>101,902</td>
<td>74,684</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>39,319</td>
<td>38,040</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donated Services</td>
<td>171,713</td>
<td>170,051</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENSES</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,586,424</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,905,618</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in Net Assets</td>
<td>$(30,434)</td>
<td>$(905,540)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Assets - Beginning of Year</td>
<td>$5,914,549</td>
<td>$6,820,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Assets - End of Year</td>
<td>$5,884,115</td>
<td>$5,914,549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Impact
Impact

Who We Are

Asha for Education is a non-profit organization dedicated to change in India by focusing on basic education with the belief that education is a critical requisite for socio-economic change.

In keeping with this focus, our volunteers are involved with and support projects that have an education-related component to them.

In 2019, our organization continued to support numerous projects throughout India, reaching many milestones as we have grown and expanded our reach through fundraisers, awareness events, and collaborating with project partners.

Here are just a few of our many accomplishments from this past year.

- $3.2 million USD raised
- 100+ fundraisers
- $3.3 million USD disbursed
- 300+ funding disbursements
- 180 unique projects funded in 22 states in India
- 219K+ students supported
- 1500+ volunteers
- 46 active chapters
Disbursements by Project Type

- Alternative Education, 73, 24.5%
- Resource Centers / Supplemental Learning, 30, 10.1%
- Vocational Training / College Prep, 13, 4.4%
- Community Based, 20, 6.7%
- Formal Schools, 36, 12.1%
- Fellowships, 12, 4.0%
- Residential Schools / Homes for Children, 38, 12.8%
- Educational Reform of Govt Schools, 8, 2.7%
- Pre-Primary, 25, 8.4%
- Other, 6, 2.0%
- Special Needs, 37, 12.4%

State-wise disbursements of funds

- Andhra Pradesh, $194,295.95, 6%
- West Bengal, $519,180.54, 16%
- Assam, $89,334.71, 3%
- Bihar, $39,327.64, 1%
- Chhattisgarh, $19,655.19, 1%
- Delhi, $161,636.53, 5%
- Gujarat, $121,744.37, 4%
- Haryana, $30,020.17, 1%
- Himachal Pradesh, $8,719.10, 0.3%
- Jammu & Kashmir, $54,435.23, 2%
- Jharkhand, $6,930.01, 0.2%
- Karnataka, $211,966.49, 6%
- Kerala, $45,554.06, 1%
- Madhya Pradesh, $59,899.17, 2%
- Maharashtra, $394,097.09, 12%
- Manipur, $33,523.14, 1%
- Orissa, $127,126.55, 4%
- Rajasthan, $156,503.34, 5%
- Tamil Nadu, $584,100.87, 18%
Geographic Breakdown of 2019 Funds Disbursements

% Funds Disbursed
- 17–18%
- 10–12%
- 4–6%
- 3–3.9%
- 2–2.9%
- 1%
- <1%
Project Spotlight
Nishtha - Night Shelter
Supported by the Asha Atlanta Chapter

Asha Atlanta volunteer Agniva Roy shares with us some of the work of their project partner, Nishtha Night Shelter, which Asha Atlanta has been supporting since 2007-2008.

Asha for Education has been supporting Nishtha’s educational programmes since 2008. The initial focus was on providing support towards educating girls in a society where it was not a regular practice. Nishtha is an organisation working for women’s rights and gender equality in Baruipur, West Bengal. Operating with limited resources, but driven by the boundless energy of their youth leaders, workers, and director Mina Das, Nishtha has triggered a grassroots level revolution over the course of the last few decades in rural Bengal, and has done admirable work to change the social structure and emancipate women. Yet, they face an uphill challenge, with a large section of society rooted in regressive traditions, in opposition to granting women equal rights, practising child marriage, domestic abuse, and trafficking regularly.

Photos: i) A child at the Nishtha Shelter working on a drawing ii) Children learning dance at the Shelter
Talking to ‘Minadi,’ as Mina Das is fondly called by everyone, I have come to realise how deep-rooted some of these issues are. Many school teachers, elders, and authoritarian figures espouse traditions and regressive values. It has contributed to a systematic distortion of how boys and girls see each other. Minadi has been working for Nishta her whole life -- the organisation was originally set up as a women’s self-help group within three villages by her mother, Ms Pritilata Das. It has since expanded dramatically, both in scope and in numbers.

Minadi dreams of a world in which girls will not be shackled to traditional roles, and can freely work and move as they please -- a world in which men and women respect one another as humans. She is determined to change the archaic society of these areas, a mere 30 or so kms from Kolkata, where, despite many other issues, girls are not barred from studying or working, and child marriage is a term people think as being confined to history books.

**IN 2014, WITH ASHA ATLANTA’S SUPPORT, NISHTHA BUILT A NIGHT SHELTER FOR CHILDREN OF SEX WORKERS IN BARUIPUR, WEST BENGAL.**

All Nishta workers have a loving relationship with the people for whom they work, and see themselves not as beneficiaries of benefactors, but as friends. Their conversations weave through local politics, organisational goals, administrative issues, and are interspersed with anecdotes, jokes, and friendly ribbing. This easy relationship has helped the workers inspire self-belief and confidence in thousands of girls and women, who have not only found guidance, but friendship and community. One example of this is seen when these youths raise money through their own contributions to support the education of some of their friends who cannot afford it. This is all the more striking, because most of them can barely get by themselves, but still have the empathy to set something aside from their own tutoring money for their friends.
Sex workers in a colony in Baruipur are another section of society who have found aides in Nishtha. These women, numbering about a hundred, are often lured or trapped in the business, at the mercy of certain powerful people and their clients, and get to keep a meagre portion of their own earnings to take care of themselves. Their children, before Nishtha and Asha had intervened, would grow up in this colony, spending most of their time on the streets, rejected by society, and would inevitably be sucked into the flesh trade. Nishtha workers began to take care of these children by going to these colonies, meeting them and trying to get them to schools. In 2014, with Asha Atlanta’s support, Nishtha built a Night Shelter for these children. Now, about 30-35 children from the colony spend a large part of their day there, go to school, have tutors for singing, and dancing, and are also given healthy meals. In only a matter of 5 years, these children’s lives have transformed, visibly as well as emotionally. Despite the horrors they have to live through, their mothers are happy to have dreams of an alternative life for their children.

TWO GIRLS RECENTLY GRADUATED AS NURSES.... ADITYA (NAME CHANGED) WHO HAS GROWN UP IN THE SHELTER WORKS AS A DRAWING TUTOR FOR OTHER CHILDREN.

Two girls from this program have recently graduated as nurses. There are many children now attending high school, aspiring to get into college. Many of them are talented artists, singers, and dancers, as our volunteers discover during their site visits. On my visit, I was so impressed by their art that I took photos and the Atlanta chapter has made them into greeting cards. The painter, Aditya (name changed), is a bright young man in his teens, who has grown up in the shelter and who Asha now supports as a drawing tutor for the other children in the shelter. He is also taking classes and aspires to become an artist. Their tutors and Nishtha workers remark how a few years back visitors to the project would often be repulsed by these children – due to their lack of hygiene, uncouth behaviour, and foul tongues. Now, one can hardly find marks of their unfortunate origins in their personalities or appearance. That makes me think how quick we are to judge, and how little it really takes to transform their lives.
Photo: Artwork (painting) created by a child at the Nishtha Night Shelter, which the Asha Atlanta chapter has incorporated into greeting cards.

For more information about the Asha Atlanta chapter, please visit https://atlanta.ashanet.org/ or email atlanta@ashanet.org.
Project Spotlight
Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan
Supported by the Asha Princeton Chapter

Asha Princeton volunteer Amrish Garg shares with us some of the work of their project partner, Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan (PSSS), which Asha Princeton has been supporting since 2017.

Headquartered in the Orai town of Jalaun district, Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan (PSSS) is an NGO working in the Bundelkhand region that spans several districts in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This region ranks particularly low on economic and social indices due to the presence of a host of factors: lack of industry, recurring droughts, poverty and widespread prevalence of a feudal system rife with caste and gender discrimination and untouchability.

Photos taken at a site visit in Sept. 2018. Clockwise from top left: Students in front of Parmarth Kishore Kaushal Vikas Kendra; students at a middle school in a village in Madhogarh Block; a meeting with the parents of some of the students in the preceding photo; student assembly at Kasturba Gandhi Awasiya Balika Vidyalaya in Jalaun town to celebrate Teacher’s Day.
Under the leadership of Dr. Sanjay Singh, PSSS is engaged in capacity building and empowerment of deprived and vulnerable communities (specifically scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women) in order to improve their access to water, education, sanitation and healthcare.

In the field of education, PSSS coordinates with the community representatives and government functionaries to facilitate the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009. Their track record and goodwill allow them to work with community collectives, representatives of school management committees and teachers and enhance the education opportunities available to the underprivileged students in general and girl students in particular. The partnership of Asha Princeton with PSSS was the result of a site visit in August 2017. In Himmatpura (a 100% Dalit village), the villagers were forthright in thanking PSSS for help with both changing their mindset towards education and conserving their water resources. The work of PSSS was also visible at a residential school for girls in Jalaun where the organization was implementing the Kasturba Gandhi Awasiya Balika Vidyalaya Scheme of the U.P. government.

As a result of the visit and subsequent discussions, Asha Princeton stepped up to partner with PSSS to support initiatives in six villages for the implementation of the rights of the inhabitants under the RTE ACT and to improve the infrastructure in the primary and upper primary schools in those villages.

In addition, Asha Princeton has funded PSSS in establishing Parmarth Kishore Kaushal Vikas Kendra, an after-school Learning Center located in the Madhogarh block of Jalaun district. This Center provides academic help to 85 students in science, mathematics and English. The students also receive instruction in digital and ICT literacy. In the year 2020, 25 students registered at the Center took the 10th grade Matriculation exam and 35 students took the 12th grade Intermediate exam conducted by the state government before the lockdown. According to Dr. Singh, the students had studied hard and were confident of having done well in the exams. We are hopeful that the work being done by PSSS in educating the underprivileged will have a multiplier effect and lead to changes in the quality of education in the region.

For more information about the Asha Princeton chapter, please visit https://princeton.ashanet.org/ or email princeton@ashanet.org
Project Case Study
Crowdfunding and Building Resilience
Asha Austin Projects: Khushboo and GSK-Girirajpura

By Ranga Srinivasan (Project Steward, KWS and Chapter Projects Coordinator, Asha-Austin) and Mohit Sood (Project Steward, GSK-Girirajpura and Chapter Coordinator, Asha-Austin)

The Asha Austin chapter shares with us a compelling case study showcasing two of their project partners who were able to shift over to a distributed funding and crowdfunding fundraising model, which has set both projects up for a more sustainable, secure future.

Asha-Austin would like to present a case study highlighting our experience and learning from working with two of our long-standing project partners of high credibility and quality, Khushboo Welfare Society (KWS) and Gramin Shiksha Kendra (GSK).
Khushboo Welfare Society (KWS)
Asha for Education and the Austin chapter started working with Khushboo Welfare Society (KWS) in 2008. KWS is a holistic center catering to children with mental and multiple disabilities based in Gurgaon, Haryana. Asha-Austin supported the salaries of special educators from 2008-12 and is currently supporting salaries of therapists/teachers for their new initiatives started in 2016. From 2008-12, their annual operating budget was in the range of 40-80 lacs INR and Asha-Austin used to support 10-15% of their needs. Their donor base was limited, and fundraising was ad hoc with reliance on big donors. KWS was forced to innovate and look towards a broad-based fundraising model when a few of their big donors, including Asha-Austin, backed out of support in the 2013-14 timeframe.

"BY BREAKING DOWN THEIR BUDGETS TO MEANINGLEFUL SUPPORT AMOUNTS AND SOLICITING SMALL DONATIONS AND A SUSTAINED FOCUS ON CSR, KWS WAS ABLE TO GET TO OPERATING BUDGETS OF 1.5 CRORES INR"

KWS, where, outside of big foundations/donors, they were interested in cultivating a donor base consisting of many small donors. As an example, 1000 donors contributing 1000 INR a year, still amounted to 10 lacs INR/ year, equivalent to a big donor. By breaking down their budgets to meaningful support amounts and soliciting small donations along with a sustained focus on CSR and grants from big foundations, KWS was able to leverage both avenues and get to operating budgets of 1.5 crores INR, a 2x increase from 2012-13 to 2018-19 (6 years time-frame), with a working capital ratio (WCR) of about 1.2 in 2018-19. More importantly, it gave them the confidence to minimize impact on daily operations when a big donor backed out. Their model was resilient enough.
Gramin Shiksha Kendra (GSK)
Asha for Education and the Austin chapter started working with Gramin Shiksha Kendra in 2005, and was one of GSK’s first project partners. GSK works on alternative education in rural parts of Rajasthan. Asha-Austin has supported three model GSK schools - Jaganpura and Bodal from 2005-12, and Girirajpura from 2015. GSK’s fundraising model was primarily relying on huge foundational grants to meet their operating needs. While their dependence on huge grants was beneficial in the short-term, it had long-term consequences where they had to look for a replacement once a big donor backed out, impacting their operations.

GSK was having a poor fundraising year in 2018-19 and got back to us with an anticipated shortfall close to 50% of their operating needs. With additional one-time funds to support a portion of their shortfall, Asha-Austin encouraged GSK to build a crowd-funding model to work towards a broad donor base, based on its learning from Khushboo. In fact, GSK was able to exceed its operating needs and generate surplus funds for reserves from a shortfall scenario in 2019. GSK is now leveraging various crowd-funding platforms after having built credibility with Asha’s engagement, through great accounting practices and by improving its WCR to about 0.9 in 2018-19 from 0.5 in 2017-18 with operating budgets of 1.5 crores INR.
"HELPING THE PROJECTS BUILD BOTH CREDIBILITY AND A DISTRIBUTED DONOR BASE WHILE TAPPING INTO ONLINE CROWD-FUNDING WOULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY."

Conclusion
Currently, Asha-Austin has a few projects that are primarily reliant on Asha support with a WCR of < 0.5. This always puts these projects in high-risk categories as their schools would stop functioning in less than a year if Asha were to back out. Helping the projects build both credibility and a distributed donor base while tapping into online crowd-funding (e.g. Global Giving, Give India, Give Asia, Milaap, Ketto, Concern India Foundation) would go a long way towards sustainability when it comes to recurring expenses and operational needs.

In summary, we believe that we can better ensure our projects and schools are set up for success by implementing certain practices i.e. evaluating our projects for their WCR, monitoring % of Asha support over the period of engagement, incorporating knowledge of our projects’ other funding partners, monitoring project partner audit reports, working with project partners to help them seek other sources of funding, and building crowd-funding platforms. A true mark of success for a project partner, for the chapter and its volunteers and donors, and Asha for Education would be when the chapter’s support becomes inconsequential to the project partner. We believe both KWS and GSK are on the path towards sustainability with a proactive leadership and fundraising team.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank KWS for sharing insights into their new distributed fundraising model through crowd-sourcing for sustained operations. We would like to thank GSK for their openness to our suggestions to improve on their fundraising.

For more information about the Asha Austin chapter, please visit https://austin.ashanet.org/ or email austin@ashanet.org.
Project Partner Speaks

Jitendra Pandey
Founder, CAHUS
Supported by the Asha San Francisco Chapter

The Asha San Francisco chapter would like to celebrate the work of Mr. Jitendra Pandey, who has been actively involved with project partner Chhotanagpur Adivasi Harijan Uthan Samiti (CAHUS) [formerly Saugaht Foundation] since 2014, when he founded the project school. This pre-primary school serves a community in rural Jharkhand, and is fully reliant on Asha’s support to make this work possible. Mr. Pandey previously served as the President of the Saugaht Foundation from 2014-2019. He has been a true champion for the community, undertaking significant effort to ensure the on-going health and success of the project school. Here, Mr. Pandey shares some of the early challenges of persuading impoverished rural families to send their children to the school, the successes he and his team achieved in turning around the community attitude toward education, and the important role this project plays both within the local community and with the larger goal of ending the vicious cycle of poverty.

The school project, which is currently being run by Chhotanagpur Adivasi Harijan Uthan Samiti (CAHUS), was originally started by Saugaht Foundation in 2014. Mr. Jitendra Pandey, then President of Saugaht Foundation, was working on long-term goals for the empowerment of the local rural, under-resourced populations and marginalized tribal communities of Phakiradih Panchayat in the Garhwa district of Jharkhand.
His goal was to help the local community become self-dependent and achieve physical, mental and socio-economic well-being. Upon finding that the tribal parents could not fulfill basic needs for their children, Mr. Pandey and his team determined that a pre-primary school could help meet this need and enact change in the entire community.

Saugaht Foundation searched for funding partners and support, and got connected to the San Francisco chapter of Asha for Education. Asha San Francisco approved the funding proposal for a new school educating 40 underprivileged tribal children between the ages of 3-5 years. Thus, a project for the basic education of tribal children and their parents, supported by Asha San Francisco, was implemented in July 2014 in Path village under Phakiradih Panchayat in Bhandariya Block in the Garhwa district of Jharkhand. After years of efforts to educate parents on the importance of education, the school now enrolls about 50 children per year, with many more eager to join.

In 2019, due to some local issues with the Saugaht Foundation, the school was at risk of closing. Knowing the importance of this project school for the community, Mr. Pandey worked tirelessly to ensure it would survive. Not only did he volunteer to continue championing the school, he searched for additional support from local NGOs, with the goal in mind of making sure the children could continue to receive medical care, nutrition, and education.

He took out personal loans to pay the school teachers and ensure that the children had adequate food and education during the transition period. Despite having a full-time job, he traveled several hours every week via bike on uneven dirt roads just to make sure the school was running well. Now, the project school has been successfully transitioned to another local NGO, CAHUS, and it continues to run under the direct supervision of its passionate founder, Mr. Jitendra Pandey.
What have you considered to be the most significant challenges of this work with the Saugaht / CAHUS project?

Mr. Pandey: At the initial stage, the greatest challenge for us had been motivating the illiterate tribal parents to bring their little kids to our school. In fact, those tribal families had preferred that their children accompany them into the forest to help collect firewood and various other forest-products. We arranged for breakfast and lunch for the children, which motivated parents to send their children to the school. Another challenge was to convince some parents to give up the habit of drinking alcohol, which put those families and especially our school children in deep trouble.

After 3-4 years, our project has created tremendous enthusiasm among the tribal parents to put their little children in our school. But due to this positive impact of the project, we are faced with community pressure to accommodate all the community children in our centre. Since the total number of seats is limited to 50, we didn’t have any other option but to turn away some students, which has disheartened many parents. As the parents are also illiterate, we fail to make them understand that the project funds are limited and we are dependent upon the donations coming from foreign countries. It has really created a delicate situation to refuse them after we had sensitized parents to send their children to schools.

What have been your major accomplishments to date?

Mr. Pandey: Changing hearts and minds. Currently the project in Path village is highly visible in the rural area. The implementation of this project over the last five years (since June 2014) has brought about a substantial change in the outlook of the community towards the education of little children. Also, our project has brought a visible change in the habits of the children of the project village - the children are now eager to go to our school regularly.

As for the major accomplishments of our pre-primary school project, we have prepared socially excluded little tribal-children and gotten them admission into local formal primary schools for their main schooling.
During the last four years, a total of 60 children from this tribal community have been entered into formal primary schools. This is an important milestone that the school has achieved. Parents of our children have become more sensitized regarding their children’s education. The school-going children are also creating interest in the minds of their younger siblings, who are also eager to come to our school to study.

What do you consider to be the importance of the work that this school project does for its students and the overall community?
Mr. Pandey: We believe that our school project is playing a vital role for the future life of the students as well as for the overall community. The importance of this project’s work is that it provides a stepping stone of formal education for its students. Since we believe that education is the greatest weapon in the fight against poverty, we have hopes that the tribal community will be able to come out from the vicious cycle of poverty in the next generation with the help of this project.

What gap do you feel this school project fills within the Educational Landscape in India?
Mr. Pandey: The major gap has been the inability of the government to organize proper formal education for downtrodden children, especially those in remote, rural areas. We feel that our school project fills this vital gap within the Educational Landscape in India.

What is the role that Asha and other non-profit organizations play in supporting the work that you do?
Mr. Pandey: Asha for Education plays a vital role in supporting this school project. We need to get financial support for the continuation of our pre-primary school project. We are a very small NGO with limited financial resources. Currently we don’t have any source of income other than Asha San Francisco’s funding to run this project. Therefore, we are absolutely dependent upon grants from Asha and grateful for the support.

For more information about the Asha San Francisco chapter, please visit https://sf.ashanet.org/ or email sf@ashanet.org.
Asha Fellow Spotlight
Gautam Gauri,
Diksha Foundation
Supported by the Asha Purdue Chapter

Asha for Education has an Asha Fellowship Program which enables Asha chapters to provide financial support to highly dedicated non-profit leaders in India to enable them to take on more innovative work in their communities, with the aim of creating a large positive impact over time. Asha Purdue nominated and secured Gautam Gauri, the Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Diksha Foundation, to nurture his ideas on inclusive education and community development. Here, the chapter provides us with an overview of the hard work that Mr. Gauri has done since becoming an Asha Fellow for this project in 2017.

The Asha Purdue chapter has over 30 volunteers supporting multiple projects across Bihar (Diksha, Naari Gunjan), Himachal Pradesh (Avishkaar), Orissa (Basundhara) and Telangana (Manasa). Asha’s partnership with Gautam Gauri, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Diksha Foundation, began in 2012 through the Purdue chapter’s support of the Diksha KHEL Centre in Patna. In 2017, Gautam was offered additional support through the Asha for Education Fellowship Programme to nurture his ideas on inclusive education and community development. This Fellowship was created to enable Gautam to experiment with and implement innovative ideas to improve the quality of education and socio-emotional development of learners coming from underprivileged backgrounds.

Gautam is a highly skilled Educator with a Masters in Primary Education from the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom and a MBA from Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad, India. He has been working on the ground in Bihar since 2010.
Gautam has worked on many interventions that have helped children learn values, provide self-development and nurture leadership potential. These interventions are carried out in the form of various programmes that benefit children and teachers, as well as parents in one way or another.

Gautam is currently working on five different projects under his Fellowship, each tackling a different facet of inclusive education and community development. These projects include:

- **KHEL** - an after-school supplementary education programme
- **Index for Inclusion** - focusing on teacher development to make schools inclusive
- **SEE Learning** - a pilot of an emotional ethical learning curriculum
- **Bihar Youth Collective** - a forum of organizations working on the development of youth & adolescents
- **People Centric Smart City Patna** - a project to make Patna smart and inclusive

The Index for Inclusion, for instance, aims to create inclusive schools where each child is treated with dignity and respect irrespective of their biographical identity. Gautam is leading this activity in five schools of Patna. In this programme, sessions are organized to bring behavioural change amongst the educators and institutional staff. Additionally, the workshops are organized with teachers in order to build collective ownership of what goes on in the classrooms and in the school in general.

"A SOCIETY CANNOT BECOME MODERN IF ITS MOST VULNERABLE AND DOWNTRODDEN SECTIONS ARE NOT INTEGRATED INTO THE MAINSTREAM."

Photo: Mr. Gautam Gauri, Asha Fellow
Apart from training teachers and educators, Gautam is also focused on the social and emotional development of children. For this, he uses the Social-Emotional Ethical Learning Framework developed by Emory University and the Dalai Lama Trust and conducts classroom activities to make the children aware, compassionate and responsible global citizens. This sort of collaboration is critical for community living, where children have limited access to resources.

Photos: i) Inclusive Education Workshop - as a part of the work being done on the Index for Inclusion, ii) A meeting with Diksha’s Covid 19 response team at the Patna Municipal Office, iii) - Diksha Annual Day Celebration event at KHEL Patna Learning Centre, iv) - A discussion group part of the Index for Inclusion Activities

Bihar’s civil society is weak on account of multiple factors, including lack of trained human resources, limited CSR activities and poor infrastructure. In 2019, Gautam played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Bihar Youth Collective - a group of 11 organizations working on youth education through a civic education programme.
This project teaches civic rights and responsibilities to youngsters to help them become responsible citizens. Gautam and his team are working with the 11 organizations and Community: The Youth Collective (CYC), India to provide civic education modules to 3000 children in different districts of Bihar.

A society cannot become modern if its most vulnerable and downtrodden sections are not integrated into the mainstream. As such, Gautam is also working with the Patna Municipal Corporation and United Nations Population Fund to develop Patna into a socially inclusive and smart city. He is working on a training programme to educate 5000 sanitation workers on health, hygiene and safety. Providing adult education and skill enhancement of the most vulnerable sanitation workers is expected to improve the quality of their lives.

As the world has suddenly been gripped by COVID-19, Gautam and team Diksha have stepped up to deliver essential services with the Patna Municipal Corporation. They are working around the clock to train municipal workers on COVID-19, identify pregnant women in order to connect them to transport for safe delivery, and run an outbound tele-counselling service for vulnerable citizens of Patna.

In 2019, Gautam lost his mother to double-hit lymphoma, a rare type of blood cancer. In addition to all of his other work, Gautam is working to set up a Blood Cancer Support Centre for patients and caregivers who need information and guidance regarding lymphoma, leukaemia and other forms of blood cancers. The centre will provide assistance and necessary information regarding treatment options and linkages to doctors across India through telemedicine.

Asha Fellow Gautam Gauri can be reached at gautamgauri@dikshafoundation.org.

For more information about the Asha Purdue chapter, please visit https://purdue.ashanet.org/ or email purdue@ashanet.org.
Our Chapters
Chapters

Who We Are

Asha for Education has 45+ chapters across three continents (North America, Europe, and Asia) – all working towards Asha's core mission of achieving 'socio-economic equality through the education of underprivileged children'.

Chapters carry out this mission through fundraisers, awareness events, and collaboration with project partners throughout India. Involvement with Asha has produced an awareness about developmental issues in India and has inspired a whole range of volunteers to get involved in other social causes.

There has also been an increased emphasis on the formation of more chapters in India (called Asha Centers) to draw upon the collective energy and experience of volunteers in India and to build closer bonds with our projects. These serve to network like-minded individuals and pioneer bold new initiatives in education. Thus, our chapters are helping prepare volunteers who are more socially aware and responsible in their lives.
Journey to changing lives

Chapter Spotlight: Asha Danbury

Asha Danbury celebrates its 10th year as an Asha chapter in 2020. Below, Asha Danbury co-founder and Chapter Coordinator, Lalitha Podila, shares some of their chapter events and highlights from 2019, and showcases how the chapter has been able to engage with and support the local Danbury community.

Since the launch of Asha Danbury in 2010, we’ve incorporated local volunteering into our vision, while leveraging resources to support the education of underprivileged children in India. As we celebrate our 10th anniversary and reflect on the previous year, 2019 was another year in which we engaged with the Greater Danbury community.

Asha Idol, a music and dance competition, continues to be a popular event at Asha Danbury. For the fourth time, we organized Asha Idol, and for the first time we saw a significant increase in adult participants wanting to be on stage in order to support our cause. The event, as in previous years, brought together donors, supporters, and children who believe in the mission of Asha for Education.
2019 was also the first year that we had organized a 5K walk/run fundraising event. The town of Bethel and police were very supportive of this event, and we were honored to have Bethel’s First Selectman, Matt Knickerbocker, kick off the event for us.

A new local Indian restaurant shared the ground with us and provided warm Indian food and drinks. As part of the event, we had also organized a food drive and were able to donate 77 lb of food to the Bethel Community Food Pantry.

In 2019, Junior Asha Danbury teams donated books and read in classrooms at a Danbury preschool, funded by the state of Connecticut and which caters to the needs of children from low income families. They also volunteered at community fairs, did face painting, and brought smiles to the faces of more than 100 children.

In Fall 2019, when the Center needed help, eight adult and Junior Asha Danbury volunteers arrived early on a Saturday morning and spent more than four hours painting the classrooms and hallways. This act of giving time helped the Center realize savings of approximately $20,000, which they can now put to better use towards educating young children. It is a wonderful feeling to be giving back to the community that we live in while staying focused on the mission of Asha for Education.

We were honored to be invited to GE’s 2019 Diwali event. It gave us an opportunity to network and showcase Asha Danbury’s work. There was great energy towards Asha at the event, with attendees wanting to contribute and make a difference. 2019 was also a year when we established a connection with students who run the Asha for Education student club at the University of Connecticut. The student club raises awareness about the mission of Asha for Education while highlighting projects of Asha Danbury on their campus.

Photos: i) First Selectman of Bethel, Matt Knickerbocker during kickoff of first 5K event in 2019 along with community member, Suneetha and team members, Ashok and Anindita, ii) Junior Asha of Brookfield volunteering at 5K event
| $20,000 | Amount saved by a local preschool after Asha Danbury volunteers came in and painted the school’s classrooms and hallways |
| 4 | Projects funded in 2019 |
| 2475 | Total number of children/equivalent supported over 10 years |
| 5K Run | First 5K Run organized in 2019 |
| 77 lb | Amount of food that was donated to a local food pantry as a result of the food drive organized alongside first Danbury’s 5K run event |
| 10 Years | Asha Danbury celebrates 10 years as a chapter in 2020 |

In 2019, Asha Danbury provided support to 420 children across 4 projects serving both rural and urban slum areas, and approximately 60% of our disbursed funds were used to support teachers’ salaries. As we celebrate the year of our 10th anniversary in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic, we continue to demonstrate good citizenship in Danbury, CT while making an impact on projects that we support in India. We know it will be another year of bringing hope at Asha Danbury.

For more information about the Asha Danbury chapter, please visit [https://danbury.ashanet.org/](https://danbury.ashanet.org/) or email danbury@ashanet.org

Project In Focus: Thulir started as an after-school learning centre catering to the needs of tribal children in the village of Sittlingi, Dharmapuri District, Tamil Nadu. Over the years, it has grown into a full-fledged primary school and their new campus, which was constructed with the active involvement of past Thulir students, was inaugurated in January 2019. The project has been supported by Asha Bangalore since 2008 and managed by Asha Fellows Anuradha and Krishna. For more information about this Asha project, please visit [https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=967](https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=967).
Asha Delaware: 2019 Year-in-Review
Chapter Spotlight: Asha Delaware


While one of the smaller Asha chapters, relatively speaking, Asha Delaware still ranks as being one of the top 5 active student organizations run by international graduate students at the University of Delaware in terms of activity. The University chapter has done an incredible job of tripling their volunteer base from 6 to 18 in the past year alone. Below, Asha Delaware volunteers give us an overview of Delaware chapter highlights from 2019 and share with us the range of innovative fundraising events that the chapter put on over the course of the year.

This article is a highlight of the key contributions made by the Delaware chapter of Asha for Education, located at the University of Delaware, over the past year through conducting several innovative fundraisers and publicity events. The chapter consists of a group of volunteers comprised of enthusiastic graduate students from various disciplines.

Highlights

- We supported two projects in 2019 - SVV Lodhar ($1,539 disbursed) and Bhumi ($1,479 disbursed).
- In 2019, we increased our volunteer strength from 6 to 18 full time volunteers and brought in a few local community members to help us gain traction in the Delaware Indians community.
- By tackling the issues of volunteer retention associated with University based chapters, we've worked very hard and raised an excess of $1,800.
- In terms of activity, Asha for Education-Delaware Chapter is one of the top 5 active International Graduate Students run Organizations at the University of Delaware.
FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Delaware Premier League Cricket All Star Weekend Event
Team Asha Delaware put up a stall at the Delaware Premier League All Star Cricket Event conducted at the Lums Pond State Park, DE on July 7, 2019. Matt Meyer, a local county executive, was the chief guest for the event, which was attended in large numbers by cricket enthusiasts from the tri-state area.

Asha volunteer Abhishek Iyer spoke about the work Team Delaware was doing and about our future fundraisers. There were also kids present at the event who agreed to help raise funds for the Asha Delaware by preparing and selling lemonade to the cricketers. We raised $245 from the event through the sale of lemonade and from donations.

Photos: Asha volunteers and event attendees at the Delaware Premier League All Star Cricket Event in July 2019

DELMA Onam
The Delaware Malayalee Association hosted its annual Onam celebrations on September 14, 2019 at the Hindu Temple of Delaware. Asha Delaware volunteers set up a stall and spoke about our projects in order to reach out to the larger community of Delaware.

Photos: i) Asha volunteers at the Asha booth at the DELMA Onam event, ii) Volunteers at the DELMA Onam event
People at the event appreciated our efforts and expressed their willingness to help, and also provided suggestions to our chapter. Many of them also wanted to be a part of future fundraisers, and a few even donated. We received a total of $120 in donations from this event.

**Chipotle fundraiser**

Can there be anything better than having a meal at Chipotle? Perhaps, if also, the same meal pays for an underprivileged child’s education. That is exactly what we tried to bring to the table by organizing this fundraiser on September 30, 2019 in partnership with Chipotle, who generously agreed to donate 33% of the proceeds to Asha’s cause of educating the underprivileged.

Since there was a minimum sales threshold we needed to hit to qualify for the Chipotle donation, we needed help from as many energetic volunteers as possible to spread the word about the event. There was a great turnout and we raised $191 from this fundraiser. We plan to consistently hold this fundraiser every six months to have some source of sustainable funds coming in for our projects.

**Movie Night**

Team Asha Delaware hosted its movie night on November 21, 2019. For this event, we screened the movie ‘Super 30,’ which was based on events from the life of Mr. Anand Kumar, a math genius who spent the prime of his life tutoring underprivileged children. The chief guest for the event was Mr. Sudhanshu, a student of Mr. Anand Kumar who now works as an IT professional in Delaware.
Before the screening, Mr. Sudhanshu addressed the audience and inspired them with his journey and Mr Anand Kumar’s contribution to his success. The event had a great turnout, with a significant number of non-Indian participants as well. *We raised $338 in the form of donations from this event.*

*Photo: Asha Delaware Movie Night attendees*

Overall, Asha for Education- Delaware Chapter is working enthusiastically and relentlessly; by increasing its volunteer base, promoting educational events and organising fundraisers; to bring an impact to the society. Our sincere thanks to all those donors and volunteers who have cooperated with us, and special thanks to Asha Central for their guidance and support.

*For more information about the Asha Delaware chapter, please visit [https://delaware.ashanet.org/](https://delaware.ashanet.org/) or email delaware@ashanet.org*

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**Project In Focus:** Rescue junction, the railway children rescue project run by People First, is a 24 hour centre for homeless abandoned and lost street children in Koderma junction in Jharkhand and Gaya junction in Bihar. It provides shelter, food, counselling, education and support for children in a safe and caring environment. In 2019, they have rescued more than 1000 children from all over India. For more information about this Asha project, please visit [https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=985](https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=985).
Distributed Models and Towards Sustainability
Chapter Case Study: Asha Austin

By Ranga Srinivasan, Mohit Sood and Subra Nathan

After a few years of a slowdown in terms of fundraising, discontinued active support of projects and volunteer attrition, the Asha Austin chapter volunteers decided to shift their approach to better align to their strengths as a smaller Asha chapter. Asha-Austin began by setting up a fixed 7-year term for their project engagements and worked with project partners to adopt a distributed fundraising model, a model the chapter was able to also successfully extend to their fundraising and volunteer retention efforts. Here, they share with us how a ‘distributed model’ can help in enabling a chapter to become more robust and better manage for risks faced previously.
Distributed models are principles that help spread out the effort to make work sustainable so as to not completely exhaust or overburden one resource in the process. In the case of Asha’s work, eternally funding a project partner with it being heavily reliant on chapter funding support is not sustainable. This often leads to high support budgets, and thereby creates a fundraising burden for the chapter, along with a potential lack of connectedness amongst volunteers. Unfortunately, in some cases, it could also lead to closure of the project partner despite years of engagement with Asha. This is a setback to the chapter as all of the volunteer hours towards project reviews, fundraising and donor support would not have had the greatest long-term impact. Asha-Austin would like to share our insights into distributed models for chapter projects, chapter fundraising, chapter volunteer engagement and Team Asha programs all working towards sustainability.

“AS A RELATIVELY SMALL CHAPTER, WE REALIZED THAT OUR STRENGTH WAS IN HELPING NEW, LOW BUDGET INITIATIVES GET OFF THE GROUND INSTEAD OF SUPPORTING ESTABLISHED, LARGE BUDGET PROJECTS FOR A LONGER TIMEFRAME.”

History
Asha-Austin had to wind down funding of all of its projects in 2012 due to back-to-back years of poorer fundraising outcomes and volunteer attrition, and thereafter went into a dormant phase from 2013-14. Funding projects at less than 20% of previously supported budgets was also demotivating to the volunteers. Without active volunteers and projects, most chapter activities came to a stall. We later came to realize that a few of our projects had stopped operations completely, partly due to us not being able to continue supporting them and them not being able to find another funding partner.

Before volunteer attrition began in 2012, we had redefined our chapter vision, which has been our guiding light to date. As a relatively small chapter, we realized that our strength was in helping new, low budget initiatives get off the ground instead of supporting established, large budget projects for a longer timeframe. There is often a latency in funding new initiatives by big organizations, and this is where we sought to play an important role.
New Approach

We decided to work with new initiatives for three years, while helping our project partners seek other funding sources, so we could wean projects off completely by year 7 as an exit strategy. Our project partners are made aware of this funding model when we start working with them. This helps the project partner to proactively work towards a distributed fundraising model incorporating all avenues of funding e.g. Asha for Education’s support for recurring expenses, their crowdfunding for recurring expenses and CSR efforts for infrastructure needs, grants from foundations, individual donations, and so on, so as to not become heavily reliant on one primary funding source for support.

In 2015-16, with help from the Asha-wide General Funds split, we began funding three projects and one fellowship with this vision in mind. We’ve found that as we wean-off a project from chapter general funds, it frees up resources that can be utilized to organically bring in new projects to be stewarded by new volunteers, without an additional financial burden to the chapter. This helps grow a ‘connected’ volunteer base and frees up experienced volunteers to move to other chapter roles and Asha-wide responsibilities. During the wean-off phase, supplemental funds can come from project-specific funds or support-a-child programs for sustainability. Self-sustaining support-a-child projects could continue beyond the seven years.

Today, we have eight projects and one fellowship that allow us to maintain diversity in our work while allowing us a focus on special needs and/or alternative education in rural parts of India. A few of these projects are primarily reliant on Asha’s support with a working capital ratio (WCR) of < 0.5. This regularly puts these projects in high-risk categories, as the schools would stop functioning in less than a year if Asha were to back out. Our chapter’s focus is to help them build both credibility and a distributed donor base while tapping into online crowd-funding (e.g. Global Giving, Give India, Give Asia, Milaap, Ketto, Concern India Foundation), as this would go a long way towards sustainability with respect to recurring expenses and operational needs.
Other Implementations
Asha-Austin is moving towards implementing other avenues of fundraising to minimize dependence on its Team Asha program, its primary fundraiser from 2017-19. Additionally, the chapter has support-a-child programs and corporate fundraisers since 2019. It regularly seeks donations in the range of $25-300, with meaningful support line-items to improve connection with a donor. Thus, a distributed model of chapter fundraising helps the small donations grow to the required big targets of 100k USD (as an example) by allowing many donors without over-burdening one avenue or dependency on a single donor, as was the case for us with the Asha-wide General Funds split that kept us operational from 2015-19.

Small focus groups and ideally, one chapter role per person, would greatly help volunteer engagement and minimize burnout. For Team Asha programs, having coaches and mentors work with small groups of runners can help distribute the effort across more volunteers, and importantly, can help build a stronger team.

Conclusion
Distributed models can be applied towards chapter projects, chapter fundraising, volunteer engagement and retention, strengthening of Team Asha programs, and so on, and would be applicable and of interest to other chapters as well. Such models would greatly help a chapter towards its own sustainability. Asha-Austin has a long way to become sustainable, and is on the path through working on the above objectives.

Acknowledgments
We would also like to thank all active chapter volunteers, project stewards and Team Asha runners, and acknowledge all of the discussions had amongst active and alumni volunteers when we revisited chapter vision conversations.

For more information about the Asha Austin chapter, please visit https://austin.ashanet.org/ or email austin@ashanet.org
Team Asha Climbers
summiting Mt. Shasta

Asha for Education
Bringing hope through education

Our Programs & Events
Our Programs & Events

What We Do

Asha for Education brings a range of programs and events to the communities it serves as a vehicle for fundraising and bringing people together.

From our Team Asha running, climbing and other fitness programs; to our bi-coastal Junior Asha Programs; to the various on-the-ground fundraising events - Asha chapters have created a variety of ways for its community members to enjoy time together while raising funds for Asha's cause.

20 active Team Asha programs in 2019

3 chapters - Seattle, Danbury, & Yale - with formal Junior Asha programs in place
Asha Stanford Holi

Asha Dallas

Asha Detroit 5K Run
Asha-28: Celebrating 28 Years of Asha
Asha for Education Biennial Conference

We provide a recap below of the Asha-28 biennial conference, drawing from a wonderful Conference write-up by Asha Chicago volunteer, Natalie Foster. Special thanks to the Asha-28 Conference Committee - this Conference would not have happened without your hard work!

Photo: Asha-28 Conference attendees gathered at Millenium Park in Chicago, IL for the biennial Asha Conference

Asha for Education hosted its’ biennial conference from June 22-23, 2019 in Chicago, IL. This conference marks the 28th year Asha has been catalyzing socio-economic change via educational initiatives in India. We had more than 50 volunteers gather from chapters across the US, Canada, and India to exchange ideas and challenges - all around the central theme of “Theory of Change.”
Asha-28 kicked off with a look at Asha’s journey over the years, celebrating Asha’s accomplishments over a 25-year period, with 291,708 children supported over that timeframe. We had a number of speakers share their experiences and provide insight into the work conducted by Asha’s core teams. This was followed by discussions around current challenges faced by our organization and opportunities for Asha over the next decade.

The Conference featured special guest speakers, including:

- Nandlal Master: Asha fellow and social activist, and project partner for Navjoti Swawalamban Sewa Sansthan.
- Rajaram Krishnan: The Chapter Coordinator of Asha Chennai, which both funds and implements its own projects.
- Aparna Pardesi: founder of Friends of Children, a project that provides college scholarships to students in need.

In addition, many long-term Asha volunteers too shared their experiences and perspectives, providing an enriching session for the participants.

Photos: i) Asha Board members and volunteers present at the conference, ii) Group brainstorming session on key challenge and opportunity areas
"IT IS SO OVERWHELMING TO SEE SUCH DRIVEN PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER AND WITH...GENUINE CARE. HONESTLY, I HAVE NOT SEEN MANY GROUPS WHO COULD DO THIS...UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM TO THE ROOT LEVEL, CONTINUOUSLY REVISIT[ING] [IT] TO MAKE [SURE] YOUR UNDERSTANDING [IS] RIGHT, [AND] WORK[ING] WITH GENUINE CARE TO ADDRESS IT BY BEING ON THE SIDE OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED...YOU ALL DESERVE A GREAT BIT OF APPLAUSE."

- RAVIKUMAR, ASHA CHICAGO VOLUNTEER AT ASHA-28

Photo: Asha-28 Conference Committee members and attendees pose for picture at the end of Day 2 of the conference

You can also hear other Asha-28 Conference attendees share their conference experiences first-hand [here](#).

**The next Asha for Education biennial conference will take place over the summer of 2021. Stay tuned for details on this in the upcoming year!**
Team Asha San Diego
Asha San Diego Chapter

Asha San Diego Chapter Coordinator, Vignesh Srinivasan, shares with us the chapter’s success with their inaugural Team Asha San Diego running program in 2019. This story highlights the important role that Asha alumni can play in sharing their knowledge of past successes and empowering new volunteers to bring ideas to fruition. It also showcases how the efforts of a small group of volunteers can turn a new idea into a reality.

Photo: Team Asha San Diego runners at the San Diego Silver Strand Half Marathon

The Asha San Diego chapter had one of our best years in 2019 with our volunteers coming up with innovative new ideas, new council members, better fundraising activities, and sustained support for our four projects.
The San Diego chapter council consists of few culturally influenced individuals who had previously organized Asha ki Diwali - a cultural evening during Diwali filled with music, dance and food. However, having organized the event in 2017 and 2018, we realized that interest in the event was dying down and the ratio of efforts expended to money raised wasn't high.

"...OUR RUNNERS TRAINED OVER A PERIOD OF 11 WEEKS, RUNNING TOGETHER ON SATURDAY MORNINGS AND BRUNCHING AT SAN IDLI TO VENT OFF THE TIREDNESS"

For the Team Asha 2019 Program, our runners trained over a period of 11 weeks, running together on Saturday mornings and brunching at San Idli (a local south indian restaurant) to vent off the tiredness. In the end, we managed to raise $7000, which was $2000 more than our $5000 fundraising goal for the event, despite two runners having to back out due to injuries. The fundraising effort definitely helped us with our Asha General Funds split for 2019-20 year and match the funding requirements requested by our projects.

For more information about the Asha San Diego chapter, please visit https://sd.ashanet.org or email sd@ashanet.org
Team Asha Coach: Krishna Dase (KD)
Team Asha Seattle - Climbing Program

In 2016, Krishna Dase, who goes by KD, joined the Asha Seattle - Team Asha Climbing Program as a participant. In 2020, KD is not only in his 4th year as a Lead Coach of the program but has also mentored the Team Asha Silicon Valley Program, enabling them to run their first successful Climbing Program in 2019. Below, he shares with us the history of Team Asha Climbing Program, what motivates him to come back as a coach in the Team Asha Climbing Program, milestones achieved, and expansion goals.

KD was already an avid hiker and backpacker even before getting involved with the Asha Seattle - Team Asha Climbing Program. He had had an interest in climbing for many years prior to joining, but it wasn’t until a friend introduced him to Team Asha in 2016 that he decided to actively train to complete his first official climb. That year, KD completed two treks up Mount Baker and Mount Rainier - the highest peak in Washington State and in the lower 48 states - alongside 5 coaches and 20 other climbers.

By 2017, KD had demonstrated enough interest, leadership, and commitment to take on the Coordinator role for the full Team Asha Seattle Climbing Program. Over the years that followed, he worked with mentors and other members of the coordination team to create a more rigorous structure and training program to help climbers better prepare for various aspects of a climb that they would encounter.

Photo: Team Asha Seattle Climbing Program coach Krishna Dase (KD)
This led the coordination team to enhance their focus on the physical and fitness elements of the training, outsource the treks up the mountains to external guides, introduce a mental training component to the program, train climbers on the unique risks inherent to climbing & help them learn how to manage for those adequately, and solidify the insurance and fundraising components of the program.

KD’s commitment to Asha for Education stems from his interest in Asha’s work of supporting underprivileged communities and women in regions of India with poor outreach towards these groups. As a coach, KD has enjoyed engaging participants who have never climbed before (who he estimates to be 2/3rd of Team Asha climbers) and guiding them as a mentor and as a role model. He also enjoys helping individuals, who are feeling stagnated in their training, find ways to overcome obstacles that come their way. In the coming years, KD seeks to expand the Climbing Program to other Asha chapters.

**Team Asha Climbing Program - By the Numbers**

![Bar chart showing funds raised and participants for the years 2010 to 2019.]

In light of the current COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and corresponding stay-in-place orders, he is leading a team to conduct a Virtual Team Asha Training Program. His aim with this Program is to get Asha community members across the U.S. engaged with at-home training regimens that allows them to set and achieve fitness goals, and fundraise for Asha projects from the safety of their homes.
TEAM ASHA CLIMBING PROGRAM MILESTONES:
THE LAST TEN YEARS

2010
A group of friends (Sandeep, Srijan, Apps, Tulika, Veera, Miles, Lawrence and Kaeli) decide to train and gather skills to climb Mount Rainier, the highest peak in Washington State and the lower 48 states, and seek to climb for a cause.

2012
The Climbing Program becomes an official part of Team Asha Seattle.

2014
The Climbing Program coaches decide to enhance their focus on the physical / fitness component of training. The Climbing Program Coordination team hires American Mountain Guide Association (AMGA) certified guides knowledgeable about mountain trails to lead Team Asha climbers up the mountains; Team Asha Climbing coaches focus efforts on training climbers.

2016
KD joins the Team Asha Seattle Climbing Program as a participant and does his first climbs up Mount Baker and Mount Rainier.

2017
KD became the Lead Coach and Coordinator of the Team Asha Seattle Climbing Program. The Coordination team incorporates mental training and and skill-focused experience trips as a component of the Climbing Program e.g. preparing the trainees for the experience of traveling and staying overnight on snow.

Photo: KD leading Team Asha Seattle climbers on a trek
2018
The Coordination team adds more mountains to the program and creates a more structured and rigorous training program.

2019
The Climbing Program gets expanded to incorporate a new Rock Scramble Training Program for a mountain in the Cascades. The Climbing Program is expanded to Team Asha Silicon Valley. KD coordinates with the Team Asha Silicon Valley Climbing mentors remotely, guiding them to put on their first successful Climbing Program.

2020
The Climbing Program gets expanded to add trek to climb Mount Kilimanjaro (both trips successful earlier in the year) The Climbing Program gets expanded to add trek to hike Grand Canyon Rim-to-Rim (postponed to October due to COVID). In spite of COVID challenges, the program continued its training virtually and hosted online seminars to get participants ready to climb mountains.

For more information about the Asha Seattle chapter’s Team Asha programs, please visit https://seattle.ashanet.org/team-asha/. You can also reach the chapter’s Team Asha volunteers at seattle.teamasha@ashanet.org.
The Asha Seattle chapter celebrated the 10th year of their ‘Junior Asha’ Program in 2019. Dheepa Ramani, one of the Coordinators of the Junior Asha Program, shares with us some of the history, highlights, and accomplishments of their Program over the past decade. The Junior Asha Program is a success story showcasing how the Asha Seattle chapter was able to get young people engaged with Asha for Education initiatives and motivate them to support the local community, and provides a framework of how we can maintain Asha’s continuity through future generations.

Junior Asha is the youth wing of the Seattle chapter of Asha for Education, and functions under its umbrella. Junior Asha has been in existence since 2009. Kavita Sharma, one of our long-time volunteers with the chapter, was instrumental in starting the youth wing as a way to get her daughter involved in Asha, which led to more youth being interested. Today we have about 60 kids, aged between 12 and 18, in Junior Asha.
The Junior Asha Team was started by Kavita Sharma and Priya Nagar and currently has 4 mentors. It is being led by Dheepa Ramani, beginning this school year, who helps run the program and provides opportunities to our volunteers. Junior Asha hosts its own events to raise awareness and funds for Asha Seattle. Junior Asha volunteers also support the local community by volunteering at non-Asha related events. In return, Asha Seattle gets to talk about Asha’s cause, spread awareness, and help support our community. Junior Asha volunteers also support Asha’s causes by volunteering at various fundraising events of Asha for Education.

Junior Asha volunteers chose to support one of Asha’s projects, Adruta Children’s Home, with their fundraising efforts. Adruta is a home for destitute girl children in Bhubaneshwar, Odisha. The Seattle Chapter has been supporting them for a long time now.

"JUNIOR ASHA VOLUNTEERS SUPPORT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY BY VOLUNTEERING AT NON-ASHA RELATED EVENTS."

The youth volunteers, as part of their contract, also undertake a personal project and fundraise for Asha for Education. They do a variety of activities like participate in running or biking events, conduct bake sales, sell art pieces made by them, provide photography services, tutor neighborhood kids and engage in a host of other activities to raise funds. Asha Seattle raises an average of around $7000 each year by the kids’ personal projects alone.

Junior Asha recently commemorated their 10th year by hosting a British Tea Fundraising event. It included an afternoon of a formal British tea set up, along with games, a silent auction, and some yummy food and drinks. This was a huge success and we were able to raise close to $8500 for the cause.
Photos: British Tea Fundraiser to commemorate Junior Asha’s 10th year. Left-to-right, top-to-bottom: i) Food spread, ii) Information boards on Adruta (Asha Seattle project being supported by Junior Asha) and Junior Asha Program, iii) Junior Asha youth volunteers, iv) Dheepa Ramani, Ranjini Rajan and Kavita Sharma, who help coordinate the Asha Seattle Junior Asha Program, v) Attendees mingling at the event, vi) Saris put up as a part of the silent auction
Junior Asha has been partnering with the Seattle Asian Art Museum for a decade, and we are thrilled about this partnership. Being a partner in the Museum’s Family Diwali event has let us explore our culture through the art at the museum while having the opportunity to interact with a wide diaspora of people. The Seattle Asian Art Museum had a grand reopening and we were honored to be invited to officially cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony and talk about Junior Asha and our partnership. The event got a lot of press, especially in the local media, and it helped showcase our cause further.

Photo: The Junior Asha youth volunteers at Northwest Harvest, which provides food for local food banks. The kids packaged bins of oats into 2 lb packets for individuals needing food from food banks.

We hope more Chapters emulate this program and get the next generation involved in giving back to the community.

For more information about the Asha Seattle chapter, please visit https://seattle.ashanet.org/ or email seattle@ashanet.org
Diwali Fiesta
Event Spotlight
Asha Arizona Chapter

Asha Arizona volunteer Rashmi Krishnamurthy shares with us the success of the Arizona chapter’s 3rd annual ‘Diwali Fiesta’ event in 2019, consisting of all-around fun with Diya lighting, a live DJ and musical performances, stalls with various crowd attractions such as Henna and photobooths, Bingo, and even a raffle!

The Arizona chapter of Asha for Education was re-established in 2015 and obtained affiliation with Arizona State University as a student organization the following year. Since the beginning, the chapter has had volunteers from across the Phoenix valley, comprising professionals and students from Arizona State University. Our volunteers work closely with project partners in India, while organizing local fundraisers and community awareness events in the valley. One of our most popular events every year is 'Diwali Fiesta'.

Asha Arizona organized its 3rd annual Diwali Fiesta on November 2, 2019, at Basha High School in Chandler, AZ. More than 100 people from various backgrounds and cultures attended this fundraising event. The event kicked off with the Indian tradition of lighting the Diya, marking the beginning of the evening.

This was followed by a beautiful musical performance by Spic Macay from Arizona State University. Kriti’s dance group from the valley lit up the evening with their jaunty Bollywood dance performances.
At the event, the team set up various stalls, virtually transporting the crowd to the quaint markets of India. These stalls included diya painting, henna, a photo booth and a jewelry stall. The booths attracted both adults and children during the cultural celebration. It is important to note that all purchases made at these stalls went towards funding projects in India.

The participants also engaged in a Bingo game and a raffle. With a short presentation about the organization and its projects, the event attracted additional volunteers to join Asha’s good cause. Dosa Grill, a new Indian restaurant in the valley, also supported us by serving amazing food to the crowd. DJ Kumar entertained everyone with his upbeat Indian music, and the crowd danced the evening away.

With the help of generous donors, supporters, and volunteers, the fundraiser was a great success! Asha Arizona focuses strongly on its humanitarian goals; and the organization’s diligence and consistency stands as a testament to this.

For more information about the Asha Arizona chapter, please visit https://arizona.ashanet.org/ or email arizona@ashanet.org.
Team Asha Triathletes at Lake Tahoe

Team Asha Seattle Climbing Group

Team Asha Seattle Biking Group at Seattle to Portland Ride finish line

Team Asha Family Biking

Team Asha East Bay Running Group (Silicon Valley Chapter)
Our Voices

Who We Are

Asha for Education would not function without its broad base of volunteer support, and the generosity of its patrons.

Here, we share the voices of various Asha volunteers - those who have worked alongside project partners on the ground, a site visitor, and volunteers here in the U.S.

We also hear from long-time Asha for Education patrons and get insights into what keeps them continuing their financial support of Asha over the years.

1500+
Asha volunteers
across 46 chapters

$3.2 million USD
funds raised in
2019 due to the
generosity of
thousands of
donors
Snapshots from volunteers visiting Asha projects
Volunteer Perspective

What is Education?

By Padmanava Sen

Padmanava Sen joined Asha for Education in 2006 after seeing a flyer for the organization at Georgia Tech, Atlanta. Since then, his life has been shaped in many ways by the organization. For the last 15 years, he has volunteered in different chapter and central team roles. Padmanava has had a keen interest in learning from grassroot projects and bringing new ideas into Asha projects. To better understand these areas, he taught voluntarily in formal school and open school settings during his time in Bangalore. Additionally, he has visited and spent more than three months at different project sites across India. He has also spoken to thousands of students across different age groups and discussed with teachers what is not working and what could potentially be improved upon in the current education system. Padmanava is currently a volunteer with the Asha Bangalore chapter and is also the 2020-2022 Asha-wide Projects Coordinator.

I am still learning how to balance ideal goals with the harsh reality of a developing country when it comes to education and livelihood. This article is an attempt to share with you the balancing act, in order to answer this question that we face in our daily lives. A more personal account of my thoughts is given in my blogpost.

The ideology

I always felt 'Education' represented a long life of learning. Our education starts from Day 1 under parental supervision. Our teachers, friends and other elders add to the list as we grow. The goals of educational institutions are meant to ignite our interests and to create some level of confidence within us so that we can face the world with that knowledge.
The knowledge does not come only from parents, teachers or books. The learning is not confined to the boundaries of school or college. The learning should not stop after securing a job. All in all, formal education is merely a start to learning when the mind is fresh and has fewer distractions!

**FOR THE ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERED SEGMENTS OF OUR SOCIETY, THERE ARE STILL CHALLENGES AND THOSE ARE TO MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR PARENTS. BUT, THE REST ARE STRUGGLING JUST TO GET THEIR BASIC NECESSITIES MET AS THEY GROW UP.**

**The harsh reality**

Unfortunately, the reality of education is very different for most children in India. There is no training for parents to tackle issues while raising and educating children. Corporal punishment is still practiced at large. There is little awareness of proper food habits during pregnancy. Early childhood developments are hampered by malnutrition, poverty and lack of awareness. The at-home academic support is missing for the children of first-generation learners. In the Government and private schools, the dismal teacher-to-student ratio is causing a major lack of personal attention to mediocre students. Most teachers prefer teaching only to the front row, and ignore the rest of the class. The real purpose of education goes missing. With hypocrisy built into our system, education has turned into a lucrative business, and good quality education has become a privilege of a lucky few. For the economically empowered segments of our society, there are still challenges and those are to meet the expectations of their parents. But, the rest are struggling just to get their basic necessities met as they grow up.

During my project site visits, I heard stories of many students dropping out of college or higher classes of school because they could not arrange a meagre amount such as 1000 INR to pay for their studies. I would hear of female students being married off because their school admission fees were too high. Many students could not secure jobs because they did not speak a language that was not their mother tongue (i.e. English).
Currently, students in the system get free education until Class 8. They start facing the harsh reality from Class 9, when almost everything is decided by the quality of school, the bank balance of their parents, the teachers they come across, some inherent merits and sheer luck. Government scholarships and schemes, while available, are not enough to adequately counterbalance these other factors.

The balance
The situation is not all negative, as on the other side of the spectrum, India is making great progress in science, technology, manufacturing and many other sectors. However, somehow, a big chunk of the population is being left out and forced into doing something for which they are not ready.

We need to accept the practical limitations of the infrastructure while preparing the not-so-privileged children for the harsh realities they will likely face. It has to come from both sides - rapid infrastructural and quality-of-education improvements from the Government, as well as a reality check from students and parents. On one end, we need to make graduates employable, and on the other end, we need Government policies that will create jobs for all sections of society. Otherwise, we risk becoming a country of even greater inequality, a country where formal education does not ensure anything.

How Asha for Education can bring the balance

Over the last 10 years, after the Right-To-Education (RTE) bill came into place in India, Asha for Education’s role in the educational landscape within India has slowly started to change. For example,

1) To address the quality of education: We had initially started by supporting formal schools, but now many of them have transformed into after-school academic support centers.
(2) School dropout rates: We started offering special scholarship programs in order to prevent student dropouts due to financial reasons with special consideration for gender inequality.

(3) Gender-bias: We started female empowerment programs to enable girls to tackle and negate the gender biases they face in society. We are slowly graduating to gender-sensitivity programs for both boys and girls in select centers.

(4) Employment: Where there is a need for skills-based training (vocational training, computer training), we have supported training centers to mobilize communities.

(5) Filling the gaps: Where there is a lack of motivation among teachers and students in a marks-driven education system, special teacher training programs have been integrated into formal schools. Additionally, we are adding digital learning tools as needed.

Fixing the lives of millions is beyond the capacity of a single organization. It is only possible through the work of the Government and the people themselves. However, our grassroot interventions enable one child at a time to take the first steps towards the needed balance. It also helps create successful models that can be scaled and in future, taken over by the Government on a large scale.

With that balance in place, for our children, education can become a source of confidence imparted by knowledge. It can be their motivation to be considerate and respectful. It can provide the strength that helps them take care of themselves and contribute to the greater family to which we all belong. If we can instill that confidence amongst the students with whom we work, then they will be much better prepared for the life ahead of them. I would appreciate readers’ feedback and comments.

Please feel free to reach out to me at padmanava.sen@gmail.com. Thank you.
Volunteer Perspective
Nurturing Government School Teachers
By Melli Annamalai

Melli Annamalai is a long-time Asha for Education volunteer, having joined the organization in the late 1990’s, and has been actively involved in shaping Asha’s Projects strategy and focus over the years. Melli has taken on many roles in her tenure with Asha, and was the Asha Worldwide President from 2000-2002. Her experience has given her a deep understanding of the educational landscape in India, and particularly that of the role and challenges of the Government school system. Here, she shares with us a case study that highlights the importance of getting government school teachers connected to the joy of learning and teaching, and how this can make a tremendous impact in the way they approach education themselves and the students they seek to serve.

Hedathale Village is in Nanjangud Taluk in the Mysore district of Karnataka, India. Like the hundreds of other villages that dot the countryside, it has a government-run high school. All high school children from Hedathale and the surrounding villages attend this school.

Photo: A high school in Hedathale Village
The challenge that arises with this school, and many others like it, is that the kind of education the children obtain does not adequately prepare them for life after school. When they finish a class, do they have a grasp of the basic mathematical concepts? Typically, no. Are they passing the class exams by repeating a few memorized answers? Likely, yes. Are they equipped with skills for life after school? Often, not.

Teachers are often blamed for these problems, with phrases such as “Government school teachers are apathetic”; “They don’t work hard”; “They are not doing their job” often being attributed to them. The question we ask as Asha volunteers is, how can we address these challenges and what can we do to create change?

To begin to address this question, we would like to highlight the transformation of Mr. S Harsha, a Mathematics teacher at this school, and share his amazing journey as a teacher, his motivators and influencers, and what this can mean for other teachers like him.

Our story starts in 2009, when the Mobile Science Van project was initiated with the Asha Boston chapter partnering with Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM) to improve the teaching of Science in village high schools in the area.

Praveen Kumar Sayyaparaju was the Coordinator of the Mobile Science Van project at SVYM. The government school teachers (Mr. Harsha among them) found in Praveen a friend, a partner, a motivator. With Praveen, they began to explore the subject of Science together and integrate these learnings through explorations of the world around them.
One of the early activities they partook in was to visit a local dam over the Kabini river, not just to admire the beauty of the gushing river below, but to also think about and discuss the Science behind the dam. Another activity was a night-time gathering to observe planets and stars, and a partial lunar eclipse. These might be common activities for teachers in some parts of the world, but it had not been the case here.

The discussions of Science soon graduated to Praveen holding regular sessions amongst the teachers over WhatsApp, generating many vigorous discussions. The teachers felt comfortable asking Praveen any question, because SVYM and Praveen worked with them as partners. They were not afraid and they were not shy.

It was as though the floodgates had opened and their curiosity had come flowing out with force. Sessions were held on a variety of topics from electricity i.e. “How does charge move from the switch to the light bulb?” to light i.e. “Why is the sky blue when we see it but in movies like Gravity everything is black?” to biology i.e. “I am supposed to show this specimen, but what concept am I illustrating exactly?“.

These activities unleashed in these teachers the innate curiosity that we all have. It strengthened the teachers’ own understanding of concepts. Best of all, it showed the teachers how much fun learning can be. In the many years prior, when the teachers had busied themselves with taking and dictating notes and memorizing information for exams in their own education, they had forgotten the joy of learning, which they could now see. “I enjoy teaching more, now that I teach concepts instead of exam questions and answers,” says Mr. Harsha. The teachers’ attitudes towards learning transmits to the classes they teach, and they are no longer apathetic about these subject matters.
These teachers want to be in a system that recognizes them and helps them move ahead. They don’t want to be just passive recipients of countless training sessions that are thrust down their throats. Says Mr. Harsha, “When I attended training programs as a new teacher, I used to think - how can I be on the other side, on the stage, as a resource person teaching other teachers? Today, if I have become a resource person myself, a large part of it is because of SVYM and Praveen. They helped me improve myself as a teacher."

WHEN YOU HEAR MR. HARSHA SPEAK, YOU CAN SEE WHAT A TREMENDOUS IMPACT THE RIGHT KIND OF INTERVENTION CAN HAVE.

When you hear Mr. Harsha speak, you can see what a tremendous impact the right kind of intervention can have. As he puts it, “We lived in a well, and we thought the well was the world and that we lived in a wonderful world. But, now we see the world has ponds, lakes, rivers, oceans. We have come to the level of a pond, and we have the confidence we can continue.” What this project has done successfully, where numerous other interventions of working with government school teachers have failed, is bring out the teachers’ own potential, and stir their interest so that they want to be better teachers.

Photos: i) Mr. Harsha leading a workshop for new teachers, ii) Mr. Harsha speaking to a visit at his stall at an event for teachers, iii) Mr. Harsha receiving an award along with teacher Kiran
Mr. Harsha continues to show tremendous initiative. From regularly working with Praveen to constantly working on improving himself, he has shown leadership in a variety of ways. The latest is through the creation of his own YouTube channel (@hardeepmysore), which has taken on new importance as distance learning grows (in the context of the pandemic). He is indefatigable in pursuing new ideas and he has begun winning awards locally for his work - and was even a finalist for a prestigious national award.

With support, encouragement, and a partnership relationship, government school teachers can blossom. Without the right kind of support, teachers end up languishing in their positions, unrecognized by their peers or their headmasters/headmistresses, unrewarded, so that they grow, yes, apathetic. It is possible to change the structure of the government school system so that the government school teachers are motivated, and they flourish and become leaders. This project shows us how.

To address the education challenges in front of us, let us focus on how we can nurture government school teachers. It does not require expensive infrastructure or radically new ideas. All it requires is working with them as partners, helping them become learners, and guiding them to achieve their goals and dreams. We CAN transform the government education system.

_Melli Annamalai can be reached at annam38@yahoo.com._

*Photo: Volunteer Melli Annamalai after a lunch meeting with Praveen, Mr. Harsha, and other government school teachers.*
Site Visitor Perspective
Suhas Satheesh
Asha Silicon Valley [SV] Volunteer

Asha Silicon Valley [SV] volunteer Suhas Satheesh shares with us some of his learnings and take-aways from his visits to three project sites and one Asha Fellow that he conducted in 2019. He describes how seeing the students go about schooling without even basic necessities in place - such as on-site toilets - impacted him, and how this allowed the Silicon Valley chapter to better define the priorities and goals the chapter wanted to have in-place moving forward for all of their projects.

In 2019, I had the opportunity to visit three projects and one Fellow supported by Asha for Education. They were:

VARUN
Shakthidham
Deenabandhu Trust
Vallabhacharya [Asha Fellow]

In this article, I would like to focus on the details and outcomes of my four-day visit to the Voluntary Association for Rural Upliftment and Networking [VARUN] project. The time I spent there certainly reinforced in me the importance of the work we are doing in trying to make education accessible to every child in India. But more importantly, it helped me connect with the cause in a profound way that no amount of ‘remote stewarding’ could have enabled.
For instance, before visiting the project, I already knew that the schools had no toilets, but seeing children urinate on the broken compound walls left me with images that I cannot forget. Before visiting the project, I knew that the children had no easy access to clean water, but watching them carry and consume buckets of iron-contaminated water stayed with me until well after my visit.

The same goes with seeing students experience the lack of other basic necessities like access to lights, fans, books, healthcare, etc. Empathizing with children in such trying conditions was possible only through the human experience of eating, sleeping, playing, and spending a few days in the classroom with them.
Once I returned to the U.S., I started discussing with the rest of the chapter about how we could address these issues. Our discussions eventually expanded to take stock of the situation at all of SV’s projects. We have now formalized the process of ensuring that children across all of the projects backed by our chapter have access to these basic necessities:

- Easy access to clean drinking water.
- Easy access to clean toilets.
- Continuous supply of lights and fans through electricity or solar.
- Availability of first aid kits at school/project premises.
- Annual medical check-ups for all the children.
- Library with minimum of 2:1 ratio of books to children.

**WE HAVE MOBILIZED CLOSE TO $70,000 IN FUNDS SPECIFICALLY TO PRIORITIZE THESE INITIATIVES ACROSS OUR PROJECTS.**

We have mobilized close to $70,000 in funds specifically to prioritize these initiatives across our projects. We hope to finish the year 2020 with all Asha SV-supported children having access to these basic necessities.

As volunteers, we may feel hopeless and helpless about the state of affairs on the ground at times. But if we use that as an excuse to give up, the lives of these children will only get harder. We are part of an ecosystem of governmental and non-governmental organizations that is slowly but surely moving the needle. Asha backed projects and Fellows have reached children in communities that are otherwise neglected. Amidst all the hardships, these children carry in them hope and desire to break out of the shackles. They are different from our very own children in that they have several more obstacles to surmount, but they are the same as our children in that they also want to study, play, fight, love, and grow up to become lawyers, farmers, and doctors. We are all in this together.
Here are clickable reports and video summaries from my site visits:

- **Shakthidhama site visit**
- **Deenabandhu Trust**
- **Meeting w/Vallabhacharya Pandey**
- **VARUN site visit**

For more information about the Asha Silicon Valley chapter, please visit [https://sv.ashanet.org/](https://sv.ashanet.org/). You can also reach the chapter volunteers at sv@ashanet.org.
Volunteer Experiences
Harnessing Today for Asha Berkeley's Tomorrow
By Rithika Neti, Asha Berkeley Volunteer

Asha Berkeley volunteer Rithika Neti shares with us her experience as an Asha volunteer in Asha’s oldest Chapter, at the University of California, Berkeley. Hear from Rithika as she reflects on what her time within her ‘Asha Berkeley family’ has meant to her and how it has allowed her to make a meaningful impact. Rithika also shares with us the work the chapter is doing to raise awareness around the campus about various issues affecting the South Asian community.

Like thousands of other students, I had to fly home on March 15, leaving my second home at the University of California, Berkeley. As I now find myself at home while the world suffers from a global pandemic, I’ve been reflecting on and cherishing things I never did back when I was still on my college campus. One of the things I miss the most is my Asha Berkeley family. As the oldest Asha chapter, Asha Berkeley continues to serve as the nexus between culture, innovation, and the general mindset to help those in need.
COMING TO BERKELEY, I WANTED TO FIND AN ORGANIZATION THAT WOULD NOT ONLY CONNECT ME WITH MY ROOTS BUT ALSO HELP ADDRESS SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT FACE INDIA TODAY.

Coming to Berkeley, I wanted to find an organization that would not only connect me with my roots but also help address some of the significant challenges that face India today—malnutrition, education, poverty, and gender inequality. Often, it can be difficult to integrate future professional plans with a passion for social good, especially in a university setting, but at Asha Berkeley, we have the opportunity to host fundraisers and events in our community, develop and practice essential life skills, and of course, serve as volunteers for our projects.

Being a university chapter, the biggest barrier that remains is that as undergraduate college students, we cannot significantly contribute financially ourselves nor can we persuade other students to do so; therefore, our chapter mission strives to not only act as stewards for our projects but also increase awareness of these underlying socioeconomic conditions that exist in India. In line with these objectives, we often find ourselves hosting small-scale fundraisers that appeal to the general college population. This includes selling mango lassi, samosas, Indian sweets or jewelry as well as roses on Valentine’s Day and at our increasingly popular Bollywood Karaoke Night. We leverage both what college students crave and enjoy, and partner with other South Asian and social good initiatives on campus.
This year, we had the opportunity to organize one of our largest events to date—our annual forum. Forum both advances Asha’s cause and raises awareness of a key issue within the South Asian community and its diaspora. Previous forum topics have included water and sanitation issues in South Asia, caste and religious conflicts in modern India, and the stigma surrounding sexual health for women.

This year, we decided to address colorism in India, the idea that darker skin is less desirable or beautiful. This is evidenced by the over 200+ tons of skin-whitening and skin-bleaching products that are consumed every year in India. Our event featured an interdisciplinary and knowledgeable panel of experts, engaging in a conversation around colorism and its impacts in the beauty industry, on human development and psychology, and its socio-economic/caste implications. Forum not only allows us a platform to promote the incredible work that Asha does but also fosters dialogue about key issues that serve as barriers to an equitable India. Along with Forum, we host Images of India, a large-scale cultural benefit, where besides delicious food and highlights of Asha Berkeley’s projects, talent from all across the Bay Area and within the UC Berkeley community perform.

I’ve had the pleasure of being involved in Asha Berkeley for the past two years, and have been able to explore all the different facets of our student organization. As we now revamp our fundraising and sponsorship divisions by connecting with corporate partners as well as hosting Images of India, we continue to explore more creative outlets such as an Ideathon for Social Good competition or college consulting initiatives. Our future plans include building and developing our relationships with other Asha chapters and alumni, giving Asha Berkeley alumni the chance to continue to be involved in our causes.
As we approach 2021, the 30th anniversary of Asha Berkeley, we hope to strengthen these bonds for both professional development and project involvement.

Going forward, it gives me great pride to see Asha Berkeley, the very first chapter, making strides towards reaching its highest potential. I am honored to be a part of this chapter’s transformation as we aim to learn, grow, and revolutionize our efforts in raising money and awareness. The founders of Asha themselves used the ingenuity, passion, and vibrance of the Berkeley community to build this remarkable and impactful global organization, and I speak for our whole organization when I say that we strive to follow in their footsteps and use not just our time in Berkeley but also our future careers to advance Asha’s mission of catalyzing socioeconomic change through education. We are always looking for avenues of partnership or mentorship and would love to hear your thoughts and commentary. Please feel free to reach us at berkeley@ashanet.org. Stay safe. Stay healthy. And as always, Go Bears!

Photo: Asha Berkeley family

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ashaberkeley/
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/asha_berkeley/

Rithika Neti is a rising junior at the University of California, Berkeley studying data science and public policy in hopes of going to law school and has been involved with Asha for Education, Berkeley since September 2018. She can be reached at rithika.neti@berkeley.edu.

For more information about the Asha Berkeley chapter, please visit https://berkeley.ashanet.org/.
05 Volunteer Experiences
Asha Cornell Volunteer Perspective
By Maanav Shah, Asha Cornell Volunteer

Asha Cornell volunteer Maanav Shah shares with us how he got involved with the Asha Cornell chapter and how he’s been inspired by the level of commitment and hard work that other Asha Cornell volunteers have put in to help support Asha’s cause, all the while having fun and creating a welcoming environment.

I still vividly remember my first meeting with the Asha Cornell volunteers. It was on the fields right by the student dorms. Almost all Asian organizations had set up their stalls for the Fall ClubFest, wherein they were enticing freshmen to join their clubs. At first, my friends and I were just stall-hopping, covering as much ground as possible. But then we were reeled in by this Indian organization: 'ASHA FOR EDUCATION', the banner read. The volunteers described their organization in detail, convincing us to attend the orientation. I decided to give it a try.

Asha’s cause is inspiring, and I strongly believe in it. Even before college, I often visited different NGOs to teach younger students. However, that is not the primary reason as to why I joined Asha. I joined Asha mainly because of the volunteers. Whenever they spoke about Asha, they exuded passion and zeal. They seemed incredibly committed to the cause. At the same time, they were welcoming. I completed the 'Asha Cornell New Membership' survey without thinking twice and reported for my very first Asha Cornell meeting in Fall 2019.
Over this past year, I can safely say that I made the right decision. Whenever I hear about the different projects that Asha Cornell is supporting, I realize that what we are working for is more significant than any of us. Just the fact that we positively impact the lives of underprivileged students is unbelievably fulfilling. Of course, such an ambitious goal has its own set of challenges. I quickly learned this through the events that Asha Cornell organizes every year - its 'Fall concert,' and 'Spring dinner.'

Unfortunately, I never got to experience the 'Spring dinner' (chalk it up to a non-existent spring semester due to the COVID-19 crisis), but I did get a taste of what the 'Fall concert' was like. For this annual event, Asha invites Indian artists to perform at Cornell. It is an excellent way of introducing people to Indian music. In the past, Asha Cornell has hosted the Carnatic vocalist TM Krishna, as well as the Berklee Indian Ensemble. This year, we hosted Prateek Kuhad, an acclaimed singer-songwriter and musician, recognized by the BBC. This list alone shows the uniqueness and diversity of all the artists that Asha Cornell strives to bring in for the 'Fall concert.' I was honestly awestruck by not only the volunteers’ resourcefulness but also their continued diligence with finding different artists.

However, I think the most impressive aspect of the entire event was the sheer amount of commitment, dedication, and conscientiousness the volunteers displayed. The way they juggled their academics and event planning to make the concert a success was nothing short of a feat. I still remember the planning process for the euphoric mayhem that it was. There were innumerable, brightly color-coded spreadsheets projected before the start of every meeting. The Treasurers were going through every funding source to ensure the availability of adequate funds for the event. The PR team was continually coming up with new ideas to promote the concert. And the chapter coordinators were trying their level best to guide all the other volunteers, including me. However, amid all the commotion, they never stopped smiling. Someone or the other always brought in a new food item for the meetings. Or they cracked a lot of inside jokes (most of them flew over my head). They never stopped having fun.
I, personally, was not as involved as I would have liked to have been with the Asha Cornell chapter last year. It was probably due to some apprehension and nervousness on my part. But the other volunteers ensured that I always felt comfortable. So, whenever someone asks me why I joined Asha and what Asha means to me, I always tell them that Asha really is much more than just an organization. It really is a family (as advertised), made up of diverse members motivated by a common goal. And it really is a place where people change for the better. I am incredibly pleased to have been trusted with the post of a co-Treasurer for the upcoming academic year, and I am looking forward to another incredible year.

For more information about the Asha Cornell chapter, please visit https://cornell.ashanet.org/. You can also reach the chapter volunteers at cornell@ashanet.org.

Project In Focus: Ek Kadam is a residential educational project for migrant worker's children run by Asha Trust. Prior to their arrival at Ek Kadam, these children worked to help their parents in the brick kiln industry. For more information about this Asha project, please visit https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=990.
Drawings from Asha children
Volunteer Experiences
Asha Cornell Volunteer Perspective
By Mihika Badjate, Asha Cornell Volunteer

Asha Cornell volunteer Mihika Badjate shares with us what Asha has meant to her and how it has provided her with a sense of community as a Cornell undergrad.

When I wandered through the overcrowded hall at Asha Cornell’s Spring Club Fair, I had no idea what I was looking for. I smiled and nodded at the dozens of academic organizations, all the while wondering where I would find my new home in college. Little did I know that out of the dozens of flyers I had picked up - knowing they would all too likely end up in the recycling bin - Asha Cornell would be the one that would stick.

Fast forward two months, and I'm back home from college, staring into an endless black void of muted Zoom screens for class lectures every day. But there's one day a week that I don't immediately mute my audio and turn off my video upon joining, and that's during the weekly Asha Cornell meeting.
Over the course of the semester, with all its rocky twists and turns, Asha has kept me grounded and helped me navigate college life. Whether listening to a Treasury run-down, tasting chili-paneer for the annual dinner fundraising event, or attending an early morning Zoom call, I look forward to Asha meetings for the sense of community that they bring. And, in the past months, with the coronavirus taking hold around the world, being involved with our projects in India helps me keep perspective - while I’m here missing my friends in college, many of the projects are struggling with acquiring adequate food and hygiene supplies. Asha has allowed me to find my place within Cornell while also working for a good cause. I'm thankful to have found such an amazing group of people with whom to share the next four years.

For more information about the Asha Cornell chapter, please visit https://cornell.ashanet.org/. You can also reach the chapter volunteers at cornell@ashanet.org.

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Project In Focus: Door Step Schools. Migrant laborers in Pune face difficulty sending their children to school because of the uncertain nature of their lives. As a result numerous children end up not attending school. Door Step School steps in to fill this void by providing basic education to these children, at a location close to their home. For more information about this Asha project, please visit https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=58.
Volunteer Experiences
Asha Cornell Volunteer Perspective
By Sambit Saha, Asha Cornell Volunteer

Asha Cornell volunteer Sambit Saha shares with us how he got involved with the chapter as a volunteer and donor, the fulfillment he’s gotten in the Asha project steward role, and the friendship and bonds he’s built with other Asha volunteers as they all work together towards a shared mission.

When I joined the Asha for Education family in 2015 as a volunteer and donor. After spending a number of months that same year raising funds for the SEVA Foundation to support relief efforts for earthquake victims in Nepal, I realized how essential it was to support community-based projects in South Asia that helped to build communities from the ground up by imparting skills and education to those least likely to attain it, owing to their disadvantaged economic and social situation.

As I felt that I would be able to contribute most to education or livelihood-based projects, I decided to volunteer for Asha for Education, which was entirely run by volunteers, had minimal overhead costs and was rated highly by charity evaluators like Charity Navigator. Since I lived in central New York and close to Cornell University, which I would visit frequently for professional reasons or to enjoy various performance art programs that the University would host, I contacted the Asha Cornell Chapter President at that time, Madhura Raghavan, to find a role for me in Asha-Cornell supported projects where I could do some hands-on work. She assigned me project steward responsibilities for the Sabuj Sangha KSSN project in the Sundarbans region of West Bengal, India.
Volunteering for Asha for Education has been an enriching learning experience for me. As a project steward, I have had the opportunity to interact with children and help them in their learning process. I have also visited various Asha Projects and seen first-hand how much the support that Asha provides makes a difference in the lives of underprivileged children. In 2018, during a site visit to an Asha-Cornell supported project, Shishur Sevay, I met Dr. Michelle Harrison and returned with a feeling of inspiration. Dr. Harrison had made the cause of special needs children a mission in her life many years ago and had moved permanently from New Jersey to Kolkata to live, raise and mentor children that were disabled and abandoned.

I have also had the good fortune of building friendships in our Asha for Education family with people who share a passion for being there for others. As Asha-Cornell is a student-run chapter, all volunteers in our chapter are much younger than I am; however, over the years, I have come to realize that age is not a barrier to friendship and camaraderie when goals and missions are the same and shared. We have fun together while working together.

Volunteering with Asha for Education has helped me grow as a person and has helped me understand and appreciate better the perspectives of other people who did not have the same opportunities in life as I did. It has also helped me form friendships with many wonderful people that I will value throughout my life.

For more information about the Asha Cornell chapter, please visit https://cornell.ashanet.org/. You can also reach the chapter volunteers at cornell@ashanet.org.
Donor Share

Rajesh Soy

Rajesh and Archana Soy are Asha for Education patrons who have been involved with our organization for 22 years! Below, Rajesh shares with us how he got introduced to Asha, his past involvement helping put on Asha events for the Seattle chapter, and what has had him support our organization over the years. We thank Rajesh for sharing his perspectives as a long-term Asha patron, and for his generosity and support to Asha over the past two decades!

How and when did you get introduced to Asha for Education?

Rajesh: Archana and I got introduced to Asha for Education through our friends, Jayashree and Bash. Jayashree was a colleague at Microsoft and invited us over to one of the Asha Seattle chapter meetings. The meetings were held in the Bellevue downtown library then - I think this was circa 1998!

What got you initially interested in supporting our organization?

Rajesh: Both Archana and I were very keen on doing events, and doing events for Asha for Education was our passion at that time. We helped organize Asha picnics earlier on, and then the ‘Allgorhythms’ show at a later point. Through putting on events, we got to learn a lot about the good work being done to enable education, and that energized us to contribute more towards the fundraising efforts of Asha for Education.
There are so many non-profit organizations out there working on many great causes. Why has Asha for Education stuck out for you as one that is important to continue supporting?

**Rajesh:** I think it has to be because of the reach of the projects that Asha for Education supports, the organizational structure that is in place, and in general - the people connection we have had over the years.

Asha for Education wants to thank Rajesh and Archana for their time and gracious support over the years!

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**Project In Focus:** Samerth Talim Kendra is a center for special needs children in Ahmedabad. They provide support and services to these children in an effort to help them lead an independent life. They also help create awareness regarding disability in the community, encourage early detection and dispel myths and misbelieves associated with it. For more information about this Asha project, please visit [https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=1256](https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=1256).
Maya Subramanum and Ranjit Varkey have been Asha for Education patrons for 22 years - covering a large portion of the time that Asha’s been in existence! Below, Maya shares with us how she got introduced to Asha, how she and Ranjit put together and evaluate their ‘giving portfolio’ each year, and what has had her continue supporting our organization over so many years. We thank Maya for taking the time to share her perspectives as a long-time Asha patron, and for her generosity and support to Asha over the past two decades!

How and when did you get introduced to Asha for Education?

**Maya:** We got introduced to Asha by a friend in the Seattle area in 1998, a few months after we moved to Redmond, WA from India. We attended our first Asha meeting at the local library.

What got you initially interested in supporting our organization?

**Maya:** I was supporting similar organizations in India before I moved to Redmond. The key factors for me in committing to Asha were the fellow MSFTies (employees of Microsoft) who were part of the Asha Seattle chapter, the mission of Asha, and its’ similarity to the organizations and missions I was supporting in India.
There are so many non-profit organizations out there working on many great causes. Why has Asha for Education stuck out for you as one that is important to continue supporting?

_Maya:_ Over the years, we have developed a giving portfolio, similar to an investment portfolio. We review it each year and update it as necessary, based on how the world is changing and our own growth, understanding and evolving perspectives of the world and our place in it. As a result, this portfolio has a set of causes and organizations that we’ve chosen based on a lot of different criteria, and we allocate dollars to it at the start of each year. Very simply put, we try to give to reputable local, national and international organizations. We also try to keep a balance between direct and indirect service organizations. We focus on basic human rights - education being one of them, and shelter, food and safety being others. Everyone - humans and animals - are important, with women, children and various oppressed minorities near the top of the list. We also set aside money to respond to various crises, such as earthquakes and COVID-19. Asha fits the “international-indirect service-education-children” bucket perfectly, and has zero overhead costs, known local volunteers and a great reputation. This is why Asha has been in our portfolio since 1998. While the dollar amount that we allocate to Asha each year may change, it has been the only constant charity to which we’ve contributed for 22 years in a row.

What do you feel that Asha is doing well?

_Maya:_ Honestly, we like to pick a great organization, and keep supporting it unless the organization has given us a good reason not to. So, we hope that the organization stays great as much as the organization hopes to stay great. For us, if Asha stays true to its mission, and avoids avoidable problems, we are happy. We keep our eyes and ears open, and as long as we see healthy metrics, well-run events and messaging, and great & happy volunteers, we assume the best and keep supporting the organization.
Where do you want to see Asha go with its work?

**Maya:** I want Asha to continue to stick to its core mission and core values, while responding to the evolving realities of India and the world.

Asha for Education wants to thank Maya and Ranjit for their time and gracious support over the years!

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**Project In Focus:** Human Uplift Trust runs a home for AIDS affected/orphaned homeless children in Perambalur district of Tamil Nadu. The project was started in 2007 exclusively with the support of Asha for Education. The project currently support 100+ children, providing them with food, shelter, periodic medical check ups and quality education. For more information about this Asha project, please visit [https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=805](https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=805).
Every child, no matter their background, should have the opportunity to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment with access to quality education.

Together, we can build a better future for these children.

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Asha for Education is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization rated 4-stars on Charity Navigator. All donations made to this organization are tax-deductible in US.

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