



Asha Kiran

Asha-Seattle's Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter – October 2016



VIKASANA : A Rural Center For Education

By M.C. Malathi

Background:

David Horsburgh, a British RAF officer turned unconventional educationist had his own school, 'Neel Bagh' in a village called Rayalpadu at the border of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. There he trained teachers to start small schools in Indian villages. The emphasis was on quality education that could scale in rural India, using low cost buildings, simple adequate furniture and equipment which were made by teacher trainees. One of the schools that was created was Vikasana.

The school aimed towards providing free education to the economically and socially backward children in a self-supporting and learner friendly environment. With the blessings of Doreen and David Horsburgh and their friend Leila, the Vikasana education center was started on 12th November 1977 at Vishranti Farm on Kanakapura Road, Bengaluru, India with 5 boys and 5 girls.

What was the need for such a school? The villagers were poor, with their income dependent on farming, which in turn was dependent on the weather and arrival of rain. There was exploitation of women and children, with no schools or sources of education nearby, and the schools which existed had 80% drop out rates. Hence alternative schools - small and organic schools that were low cost, high quality, in a non-violent environment were the only way to go.

Description of the school:

Any one at any age could come to the center and start learning from where they were, and learn what they wanted to learn. We promised that they would get SSLC certificates when they were ready to appear for the exams. Proper follow up was done till every child was able to reach the SSLC level.



In the place of fees, every child was asked to bring a sapling and nurture it as long as he or she stayed in the school. All academic subjects were taught using Horsburgh's books along with crafts, games, and other extra-curricular activities. Supplementary food, health care, books and other educational materials were provided at the school.

In the beginning David and Leila provided funds and moral support. We built our own class rooms, made our tables, blackboards and other equipment. We started off with no electricity! To pay for getting electricity in the school, two volunteers (Leslie and Gordon) donated Rs4000.

Dear Reader,

Greetings to you! Our current newsletter brings M.C. Malathi's reflections on her challenging journey with Vikasana project (A rural center for education), that made a great difference in the lives of under privileged children in the Karnataka region.

An inspiring story from Mauli Desai who climbed Mt. Rainier recently and in her pursuit to rediscover herself, Mauli Desai not only helped raise money for Asha Seattle but also became a great role model for her friends and family.

Asha Seattle held its donor appreciation dinner on June 26th as part of celebrating 25th year anniversary of Asha for Education.

We have organized various events such as musical event with local OM Seattle Band. We were also fortunate to host the children visiting from Adruta home, India and to witness their enthralling performance of classical Odissi dance and other folk dances.

We are hosting several events as part of Giving campaign, contact us if you would like to hear more and support us during Give campaign.

Thank you as always, for your support and assistance at Asha for Education, Seattle Chapter. We look forward to hearing your suggestions and comments. Our contact e-mail id is seattle@ashanet.org

Growth of the school

There were many challenges that we faced in the beginning – snakes on the grounds, lack of security with only one person (me) running the entire school. We were bringing children from the villages, which required convincing their parents about the value of education. With



Leila's help we got additional volunteers which was a relief, but my workload also increased. The number of children increased from 10 to 30, as did the number of classes. The age group of children was from 5 to 18 years with older children helping the younger ones.

Some of our school's

accomplishments were that all children came to school until they were at least 10 years of age. Most of the students who appeared for SSLS exams did very well in them. Children who did not appear in the exams took to vocations like plumbing, electrician, dairy shop management. No one stayed idle. The age of marriage for many of the girl students was postponed from 12 to 18 years. The ones who passed exams took to work in evenings and continued studies, or found employment.

Learnings

I learnt a lot from running this school. With the help of flexible teaching methods, we were able to encourage the students to learn more and instill values like responsibility and determination in them. If the children had any issues, they were resolved within the community. In my opinion, this simple formula of low-cost, high-quality individualized education can be implemented anywhere effectively by a passionate leader.

Current status

After 17 years of running the school I started looking for someone else to take the responsibility. However, I could not find anyone with

the passion, patience and drive to continue what we had started, and so had to carry on for another 17 years! Meanwhile the environment in Bangalore changed – rapid urbanization of rural areas and growth in slum culture. Real estate pressures increased and outsiders came in.

We lost the location of the school to these pressures and had to shift to a new location which was and is very painful to my children and me. However, we continued this way for 3 more years, until the Government demanded that we get official recognition as a school. Since there were no young people to work with me and support me in getting recognition, I helped the last batch complete their studies in



Vikasana and join college for further studies. I am working now on plans for getting recognition or combining forces with another school that already has recognition.

Role of Asha for Education in supporting Vikasana:

Asha has been funding us since the year 2001, which was when Mr. Narasimhan (founder of Sumavanam, another school following the David Horsburgh method of education)



became the managing trustee of Neel Bagh Trust, and Asha engaged with the trust. As a school that was part of the Neel Bagh trust, Vikasana received support too. Since then Asha's support has helped us with teachers, and non-teaching staff salaries. It has been a great support not only in terms of money but in understanding our needs. Their continuing support has not only kept the school going but also me. Many thanks to the Asha team!

Mauli Desai, Rainier Climber 2016

Mauli Desai of Sammamish was afraid of being a working mom and housewife who never gets the opportunity to fulfill the dreams. "She also wanted to challenge herself and set an example for the kids by doing something extraordinary," said her husband Parthiv.

So Mauli aimed high in search of her challenge — 14,410 feet to be precise — and focused on the summit of Mount Rainier. Earlier this month, Mauli, 39, made her first-ever ascent of a glaciated peak despite having limited prior hiking experience. To add to the challenge, she hoped to raise \$1,500 for the charity Asha for Education, which provides health and basic education to underprivileged children in India.

"When I signed up for this climb back in February, I didn't have any extensive hiking/outdoor experience," Mauli said by email. "However, I had set the goal and was ready to work on whatever it took to make it happen."

Mauli trained by taking hikes to nearby mountains, including Mount Si, Tiger Mountain and Red Mountain, every weekend before leading to more strenuous and overnight hikes on Mount St. Helens, Mount Adams and Mount Baker. Her climb of Mount Rainier was professionally guided by Miyar Adventures, which trained her in safety and the skills needed to walk on the snow.

During her training, Parthiv said, she never failed to put family first.

"When she was away for almost all weekends and a few weekdays, she would always put extra efforts to make sure that her commitment to the Rainier climb did not impact our family or her work," Parthiv said.

Blogging about her experience somewhere between the ascent and the descent, Mauli became an inspiration not only to her 6- and 10-year-old daughters, but to other women from her age group.

"I see myself becoming more confident, independent and a skilled hiker who can lead my kids and other women out on a hike," Maui said. "I could see that my kids became more independent as well. They were proud of their mom. My-10-year old is big enough to understand that I have achieved this goal with tough training. I am happy to set an example for my kids that anything can be done with hard work."

In Maui's words - "I highly appreciate support from Asha climbing program volunteers Jasmine Sandhu, Dinesh and Paddy. During our training program, I met with people who were climbing Mt. Rainier via various professional firms and while talking to them I could clearly see how fortunate we were to have Asha volunteers. Other climbers did not have enough training or any knowledge of training schools or where to get training from around Seattle or how to choose and use gears. Being a novice hiker like me, there is no way I can go with professional firms. There is no doubt I wouldn't have done this without Asha's volunteers' dedication. Moreover, with professional firms, you do not know your climbing team in advance, here, during five months of training, we all team members became like family."



Events Update

OM Seattle Band:

The Seattle chapter of Asha for Education hosted an event with OM Seattle, a local band. OM Seattle was formed by a group of trained musicians, passionate about having fun while giving back to our community through nonprofit organizations. Om Band is a group of like-minded people working on creating something new which binds them together as a group. The band has been performing throughout Seattle since 2010.

The event was held on June 18th 2016 in Performing Arts Center at Interlake High School, Bellevue. This was OM Seattle's first event with Asha for Education and was well received by the audience well over 300 patrons. Prasanna Vadayar from Sikshana Foundation, a project supported by Asha Seattle, graced us with his presence and provided valuable insights into the state of public schooling in the state of Karnataka and the accomplishments of the project.



Odissi and Indian folk dance by the girls of Adruta Children Home:

Asha Seattle hosted the girls of Adruta Children's Home for an evening of Odissi and other Indian folk dances. The event was held on June 27th 2016 at Kirkland Performance Center, Kirkland and it was an inspiring event with graceful performances for a large audience.



Odissi is a classical dance form from the Southern Eastern Indian state of Odisha whose origins can be traced back to several hundred years of ancient Indian temple tradition.

Adruta is a home for destitute unclaimed girl children in Orissa. Established in 1998, Adruta children's home currently supports more than 400 children in the age-group of 1-15 yrs. The girls from Adruta Children's Home are children who have overcome early abandonment and neglect to become confident, self-sufficient young women. The Seattle chapter has been supporting Adruta Children's Home since 2006.

