

I sha Vidhya



Newsletter

Issue 4

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Seasons greetings from Isha Vidhya! As you take time to enjoy the holidays, the Isha Vidhya students are also on holiday for two weeks after completing their second term December 19. Lots has happened this year with Isha Vidhya- both in the schools and in the broader community, and we invite you to find out more through this newsletter, which includes updates on past events, future plans, and more. We hope you enjoy!



Going beyond providing education to rural children, Isha Vidhya reaches out to the children who face the greatest social and economic hardships. This year Isha Vidhya welcomed in 23 children from tribal villages. Compared with other rural Indians, tribal villagers have a distinct culture, including dialect, social habits, and hygiene. These differences often act as obstacles for the children attending school. Many tribal villagers do not keep birth certificates or other official documents and records. The children are often underfed and inadequately clothed, with minimal attention given to bathing and grooming. The majority of tribal children lack even basic education, so bringing the students into the Isha Vidhya school represented a huge step for them and their communities.

Isha Foundation is fully sponsoring their education, including transportation, tuition, notebooks, books, uniform, lunch and nutritional health supplements. The principal and teachers are making extra efforts to help the students adjust- from encouraging the parents to bathe and groom the children before sending them to school, to providing extra tutoring classes after school.

Initially, some of the tribal children were reluctant to come to school. Born and raised in the hills and forests, in many ways, they feel more comfortable with nature than people. Compared with the other students, the teachers have noticed

the tribal students tend to avoid eye contact, feel shy, and hesitate before interacting with the other children.

However, things have changed over the course of the year. Enjoying the activities, games and learning, they are becoming more and more eager to come to school. As a result, their attendance has improved, and they have started to take more care in their personal bathing and grooming. While their academic progress has been slower than many of the other students, they have visibly improved motor skills, listening skills, attention levels, and oral communication skills, as well as better general physical health. *(continued on next page)*



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None of the tribal children knew as much as the alphabet or numbers when they first enrolled; now they are on their way to reading, writing and doing simple math problems. All you have to do is ride the bus one day with these wide-eyed, curious beings, and you will know it is definitely worth the extra effort and support to include them in the school.

“Here, I like the clean place, food and water. I play a lot, learn English and Tamil, play on the computers and watch DVDs. I like games and the paintings on the classroom walls. I have learnt Tamil, English rhymes, drawing and letter sounds.”

-Ayyasamy, (from the tribal village of Madakadu)

Kindergarten student, Isha Vidhya School, Sandegoundenpalayam

Scholarships...

We did it, and it is because of you! Heartfelt thanks to the many generous individuals who sponsored children this year. Last year the children in need of scholarships outweighed the number of scholarships available, with 33% of students receiving scholarships. It was with great joy that we were able to provide scholarships to 60% of our students this year, supporting all 663 students needing assistance.

We place great importance on ensuring scholarship funds are allocated appropriately. As part of our comprehensive allocation process, we visit the home of every applicant family. Through the home visit and scholarship application, we assess the families' economic status, and allocate scholarships only to the students most in need. We also set income parameters



for the applicants; this year we increased the maximum monthly income from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 7,000 (\$125 to \$150). In the wonderful case that donations are received beyond the number of children in need, (as was the case this year), sponsors are matched with students for the following academic year.

Sponsoring a student represents a unique way to dramatically touch the life of a child. For 2009-10 academic year, we're estimating 1000 new students will need scholarships.

“I was in a deep crisis: Dhanuprasad's grandfather is suffering from lung cancer, and we were in big trouble. It was a great help that I got the scholarship at this moment (with tears). I will be grateful forever to the donor and Sadhguru. Considering my financial crisis, this help will be a true uplifting hand for my child and his future.”

-Mr. Sulochana, parent of scholarship student

For more information on scholarships, visit:

<http://www.ishavidhya.org/scholarships>



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Back to School – It’s the teachers turn...

While the students took off during the first term holidays in October, the teachers were welcomed to the Sandegoundenpalayam school to attend their second training program this year. The four day seminar built on the topics covered during the May workshop, as well as the ongoing training the teachers receive at the schools. New materials for the computer-assisted-learning and DVD classes were presented by Isha Vidhya’s Academic Coordinator, Diana Price. Following the presentations, teachers took turns leading mock classes, evaluating themselves and each other for ways to enhance their teaching. The teachers also led mock classes using many of the hands-on materials for Math and English presented in the earlier trainings, as well as demonstrating activities they had created on their own. Through the practical sessions, the teachers gained confidence in implementing the activities in front of a class and also gained insight into what methods work best by observing their peers. C. P. Vishwanath, Isha Vidhya’s Director of Pedagogy, instructed the teachers in using the Karadi Path method to teach phonetics. And for the most lively session of the training- the teachers took to the field and played physical education games led by the Sandegoundenpalayam physical education teacher P.Marimutu.



“The workshop was interesting and educative. We had the opportunity to interact with the Isha Vidhya teachers from all four schools. The mutual exchange of our problems and solutions helped us all. The feedback sessions also provided a forum for us to speak out and obtain useful suggestions and tips which we can apply in our teaching methods. We updated our skills and knowledge on teaching, and were introduced to new software and learning tools. In total, it was thoroughly professional, innovative, interesting and informative!”

-Raji Thiraviam, Isha Vidhya Teacher, Nagercoil



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Celebrations...

With its diverse cultural and religious background, the key to communal harmony in rural India is respect and appreciation for others. To preserve cultural traditions and values, students celebrate key religious and cultural festivals from a variety of regions and religions. While teachers are a guiding force, students take the lead in preparing, exhibiting and participating in the festivities.

Below are a collection of pictures from **Krishna Jayanthi**, a day honoring of the birth of Lord Krishna.

Students presented skits, dances, songs and music:



A costume competition was held, for which boys dressed as Krishna and girls as Radha, (Krishna's wife):



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Celebrations continued...

Diwali, known as the festival of lights, is equal in importance for Hindus as Christmas is to Christians. Being a favorite holiday among many of the children, they enthusiastically took part creating and giving cards as well as performing songs, dances and skits.



Older children, grades 2nd and 3rd, perform skits...



modern dances...



and symbolic reenactments...



Future Plans...



We are excited to announce construction has begun for two new Isha Vidhya schools. One school will be located in Cuddalore, an area devastated by the 2004 tsunami. After Isha Foundation adopted this and three other fishing villages hit by the tsunami, they conducting substantial rehabilitation work building new homes and generating livelihood opportunities providing new boats. Following up the rehabilitation work, Isha Foundation's *Tsunami Rehabilitation Fund* is sponsoring the school construction as a means to empower the future generations.



The second school will be located in Villupuram. Located 160 KM from Chennai, Villupuram is an economically weak, agriculture dependant area with the majority of the population comprised of Dalits (lowest Hindu caste). With crop loss and rising debt, the community has fallen on hard times, with many forced to migrate to other areas in search of work. The community is desperately in need of something to inspire and bring hope to their future. A group of volunteers came forward to donate land for the Isha Vidhya school, and *Agility*



Logistics Pvt Ltd., a global leader in logistics, is sponsoring the school construction. A socially aware company understanding the importance of improving rural education, *Agility* plans to sponsor four schools, one in each of the four corners of India. They partnered with Isha Vidhya to make this a reality in South India. When completed, the school will accommodate 1200 students with 32 class rooms, computer labs, principle and administrative offices, toilette blocks and sports facilities, all together totaling \$500,000.

Both schools will be opening for the new academic year beginning June 2009.



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Fundraising...

Isha Vidhya Walk-A-Thon, London

Ready-Set-Walk! And walk they did, when more than 120 Isha meditators and friends from near and far gathered in Richmond Park near London on the 22nd of June. The participants not only had fun and got exercise, they were thoroughly pleased with the event's success- raising over £17,000.

Under grey clouds, comically dressed Kieran Patel led participants through warm-up exercises while a crowd of amused onlookers gathered. Faces colorfully painted, Harpreet Birdi and her friends helped entertain the crowd with various antics. "Education is a grounding for life and I think what Isha Vidhya is doing for the children is amazing," Harpreet explained.

Dressed in matching Isha Vidhya walkathon t-shirts, the participants set out just as the sun started breaking through the clouds. A sprightly, 67 year old Kusum Hari crossed the finish line 1 hour and 45 minutes later, laughingly saying "I feel like the Bionic Woman!"

More smiling faces crossed the finish line throughout the day, each person sharing, as they finished, their motivation for joining the effort.



"It's so exciting to have the opportunity to help transform these young lives from the grim alternative of government schools, with corporal punishment and poor teaching. In the Isha Vidhya school, I passed classrooms where children were singing rhymes together, gesturing enthusiastically to the words... It was a profoundly moving experience to see so many bright-eyed little ones completely engaged in their experience of learning and interacting with each other."

-Pippa Vine, after recently visiting one of the Isha Vidhya schools



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London walk-a-thon continued...

The money raised from the walkathon will fully sponsor the education of 3 students for the next 14 years, plus help fund the expansion of the school in Sandegoundenpalayam. Renuka Patel, Isha Vidhya's London coordinator, expressed joy at the events success, and said she is already looking forward to doing it again next year!

Many thanks to all those who helped make this event happen!



Isha Vidhya Nagercoil- New Playground

Sponsored by Royal Bank of Scotland

Heartfelt thanks to the *Royal Bank of Scotland* for sponsoring a playground for the Nagercoil School. The playground is complete with a jungle gym, swing sets, sea-saws, and more. As you can see in the pictures below, the children are thrilled with the new addition on to their school!



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Get Involved...

The **Mumbai Marathon**, to be held on January 18, represents an opportunity for people from across India and the world to come together in support of social change. 125 dedicated Isha volunteers have signed up to run or walk in support of Isha Vidhya. You can make a difference by pledging your support. Click on the link to the left to learn about each of the runners and what has motivated them to get involved. Your contribution will make a difference in the life of a child.



Skip a Meal and Change the Fate of a Child...



Isha Vidhya recently launched a new initiative making it possible for everyone, from all walks of life, to make a profound difference in the life of a rural child.

The Skip-a-Meal program is an invitation for those having three meals a day to skip a meal each Wednesday and make a monthly contribution of the amount saved to the Isha Vidhya project. Whether it's Rs. 20 (50 cents), Rs. 30, Rs. 50, no matter; whatever the meal costs, with that amount you can change the fate of a rural child.

Beyond just the financial donation, skipping a meal each week allows one to feel a small amount of the hunger that millions of children daily experience. One meal a week is a small sacrifice, but when thousands join together, it will create a huge impact in making quality education available in rural India. To find out more and join this initiative, click on the link below:

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“What we have launched now for Isha Vidhya is every Wednesday, those of you who’re eating three meals a day, Wednesday evening you skip your meal. Whatever that meal costs, with that you can change the fate of one child. Please make this happen. If you don’t know what the value of this is, I want you to just go to the countryside, travel through villages, and look at all those bright, starry eyes, clueless as to what they will have to do with themselves. Look at those eyes once. Then you will give up your meal very easily. Do this joyfully, not painfully.”

-Sadhguru

You can make a difference! To find out more, visit our website at:

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Please share our newsletter with any friends or family who might enjoy it.



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