

Asha SV Newsletter

ISSUE 01

MARCH 2010

Editorial

We are pleased to bring you the March edition of the Asha SV newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to be the communication link between our donors and Asha with regard to the various happenings at the volunteer, chapter, and project levels. The cover story of this issue takes us back to how it all started for Asha SV and how far we have come from our beginning in 1997. Needless to say, any Asha newsletter would be incomplete without projects. Meenakshi walks us through the Puvudham memory lane and shares how her day there went. At the onset of our marathon kickoff, Coach Raman reminds us once again what it takes to run a marathon. In case you are looking for more details of our marathon program, we will host our information session at 1177 Kern Avenue, Sunnyvale on April 11th (2-4pm). Stop by and say hello.

Happy reading...
The Newsletter Team

Our History

Asha Silicon Valley (Asha SV) is one of the older chapters of Asha for Education, having come into existence in 1997, and is now one of the largest chapters both in funds raised and projects supported. It has grown radically over the years, going from a handful of volunteers and projects to over 70 volunteers and close to 50 projects in 2009. Historically Asha SV has funded a variety of projects – from large ones like Shikshana Vahini, which touches every government school in an entire taluk, to small ones like TRUWDES, which runs a school for tribal children in a very remote part of Tamil Nadu. Projects have also ranged in type - students going to formal schools (Sowbhagya, CDDP etc.), promoting RTI (MCF), supporting migrant workers and their children (JBVS, Doorstep School etc.), children at risk (Natpurwa, Rescue Junction etc.), children with mental dis-

abilities (Sankalp, Shristi etc.), schools in insurgency-ridden areas (Asha Darshan), non-formal education centers (Sita School, GSK etc.), fellowships – supporting the livelihood of people who have dedicated their lives to social work (Vallabh Pandey, Saurabh Sharma, Aheli Chowdhury etc.) etc. In the past 13 years Asha SV has worked with about 120 project partners, and has disbursed about \$5.9 million to these organizations.

To fund all these projects, we have come up with innovative fundraising ideas. One of Asha's primary fundraising events, Team Asha – a professional marathon training program that trains people to run half and full marathons in return for which each runner commits to raising a certain amount from friends/ colleagues/ family towards projects in India that Asha supports – was started at Asha SV in 2000. Over the years it has

grown from about 10 to more than 200 runners per year, and from 1 to 4 dedicated coaches and raised more than \$300K in 2009. Since its inception, the program has now been adopted by 20 other chapters across the US. Asha SV Team Asha runners have pledged more than \$2.7 million since 2000. We have also had at least one cultural event almost every year, including premier artists like Prasanna, Victor Wooten and Amjad Ali Khan, and local groups like Sanhiti, Zingaris and Thillana.

As we march into our 14th year of existence, we thank you for your continued support towards our mission of catalyzing socio-economic change in India through the education of underprivileged children. We look forward to another year of successful fundraising and active partnering with our project partners on the ground.

Venkatesh Iyengar

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Asha works closely with various project partners in a wide range of educational and development related efforts. In order to ensure the effectiveness of these projects, we monitor and evaluate them in various ways. One of the key elements of monitoring is regular site visits. These site visits are done by volunteers or friends of Asha and are documented on the project page for public viewing, and help Asha not only to maintain a transparent relationship to our donors but also to understand the issues faced by the projects.

The article highlighted below is the site visit done to project Puvidham, supported by various chapters of Asha since 2004. To learn more about Puvidham — <http://ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=578>

“Each child is given a small cloth mat; it is a notion of a private space for the child.”

About 12-15 children stopped the activities that they were doing, moved their personal mats to the corner and started hopping, jumping, crawling, skipping, etc. from one end of the room to another, as part of their exercises before lunch. These are kindergarten children in Puvidham. Each child is given a small cloth mat; it is a notion of a private space for the child. The child keeps this mat during the time spent at Puvidham and can do anything on this – keep some counting objects, words, pictures, etc. The idea behind the mat is to build a notion of privacy and private spaces early on in their childhood.

Puvidham is a school located in a small village in Tamil Nadu, India (30 kms from Dharmapuri). It teaches children till 7th grade (or 7th standard). About 100 children attend Puvidham today. Puvidham also provides a hostel facility for children whose parents have migrated to nearby cities like Bangalore in search of work. The hostel is located one km away from the school. About 56 students (boys and girls) stay in the hostel. Puvidham was started by Meenakshi Umesh in 2000 on a 12 acre piece of rocky land. Meenakshi and her husband spent time and energy in making the rocky piece of land cultivatable. They

planted trees, trained themselves in biological pest management, and started practicing self-sustaining organic farming of rice, ragi and jowar. The school is based on the ideologies of Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, using methods demonstrated by Maria Montessori and David Horsburgh.



The children are placed in classes based on age. Activities vary from one age group to another. The younger children enjoy clay jigsaw puzzles, pronunciation games and nursery rhymes. The older children are taught Science, Social Science and Mathematics and engage in farming related activities such as drawing village maps, making weather vanes and sun dials, designing better tools for plantation, experimental farming on small plots of land etc. Importance is given to creative extra-curricular activities like clay modeling, drawing, conducting puppet shows, stitching etc. Story telling is considered im-

portant to give each child the confidence to speak. Children are encouraged to help at home and are taught about their responsibilities to their families, so that the parents don't lose out on helping hands at home.

The hostel is also located in a 4 acre piece of land which is cultivated with a variety of crops. Rajeev Muralidhar and I visited Puvidham on Dec 28th 2009. Meenakshi, the rest of the staff, and the children welcomed us and showed us the school campus, hostel and the farm. We witnessed all of the above activities and more. More details about Puvidham, a detailed site visit report, photos, etc. are available at the project page.

After lunch, the children started practicing their dance and skit for the annual day performance on Jan 18th 2010. A couple of skits that we saw were based on moral stories. The skit videos are also uploaded. We bid good-bye to the children, the teachers and Meenakshi, and left Puvidham to head back home.

Meenakshi Venkatachalam

Reminiscing

Dawn is breaking as a group of people emerge from the trails at Rancho San Antonio Park and head towards their cars. Their faces are radiant despite the perspiration on their foreheads and the sweat on their bodies. One can sense the exhilaration and gauge the confidence in their stride. They are ready to face whatever lies in store for them through the rest of the day.

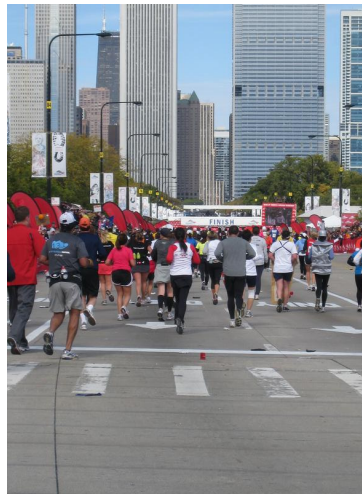
What is so special about these runners? They have not only taken a step towards improving their health and well-being, but have dedicated themselves to improving the lives of myriads of others less fortunate than themselves. They push themselves beyond their existing capabilities, reaching deep within themselves – knowing only that their pain is not as great as those for whom they are running. These are the *Team Asha** runners, who spend many hours each week training to run a marathon while helping to raise funds to educate the underprivileged in India.

Running is the most natural form of exercise. It requires minimal gear and is as simple as putting one foot in front of the other. It can be done anywhere, at any time, and under almost any conditions. Running helps promote physical and mental health, makes one look younger, and wards off a host of diseases. Yet many people shy away from running, especially when it comes to taking on the king of the races – the marathon. Why?

A lot has to do with folklore, misconceptions, and the fear of the unknown. There is the ancient story of Phidippides running from Marathon to Athens to deliver the news of vic-

tory and dying from exhaustion at the end of the ordeal. Tales abound regarding torn cartilages, sprained knees, and injuries related to various parts of the leg – ITB, calf muscle, achilles tendon. In general, the marathon invokes fear because it forces one to step outside one's comfort zone.

After completing dozens of marathons over 15 years and helping hundreds of runners fulfill their dream of running a marathon, I can confidently say that training for a



marathon is no more dangerous than crossing the road. One has to prepare for it, proceed with caution, back off at the first sign of trouble, and then complete the journey.

So it is with marathon training. Preparation includes stretching and strengthening the muscles and ligaments. Proceed cautiously by starting out slowly for one mile the first time, and slowly increasing the distance of your run each week. Back off at the first signs of a strain or pain. Gradually build up to the marathon distance over the course of a few months.

The important part of

marathon training is to enjoy the journey. As you step into unexplored territory, and grow with each passing day, savor the experience and share it with the people around you. In any journey one undertakes, having an experienced guide is useful. Your guide can help you maneuver the distance, avoiding pitfalls and dangers along the way.

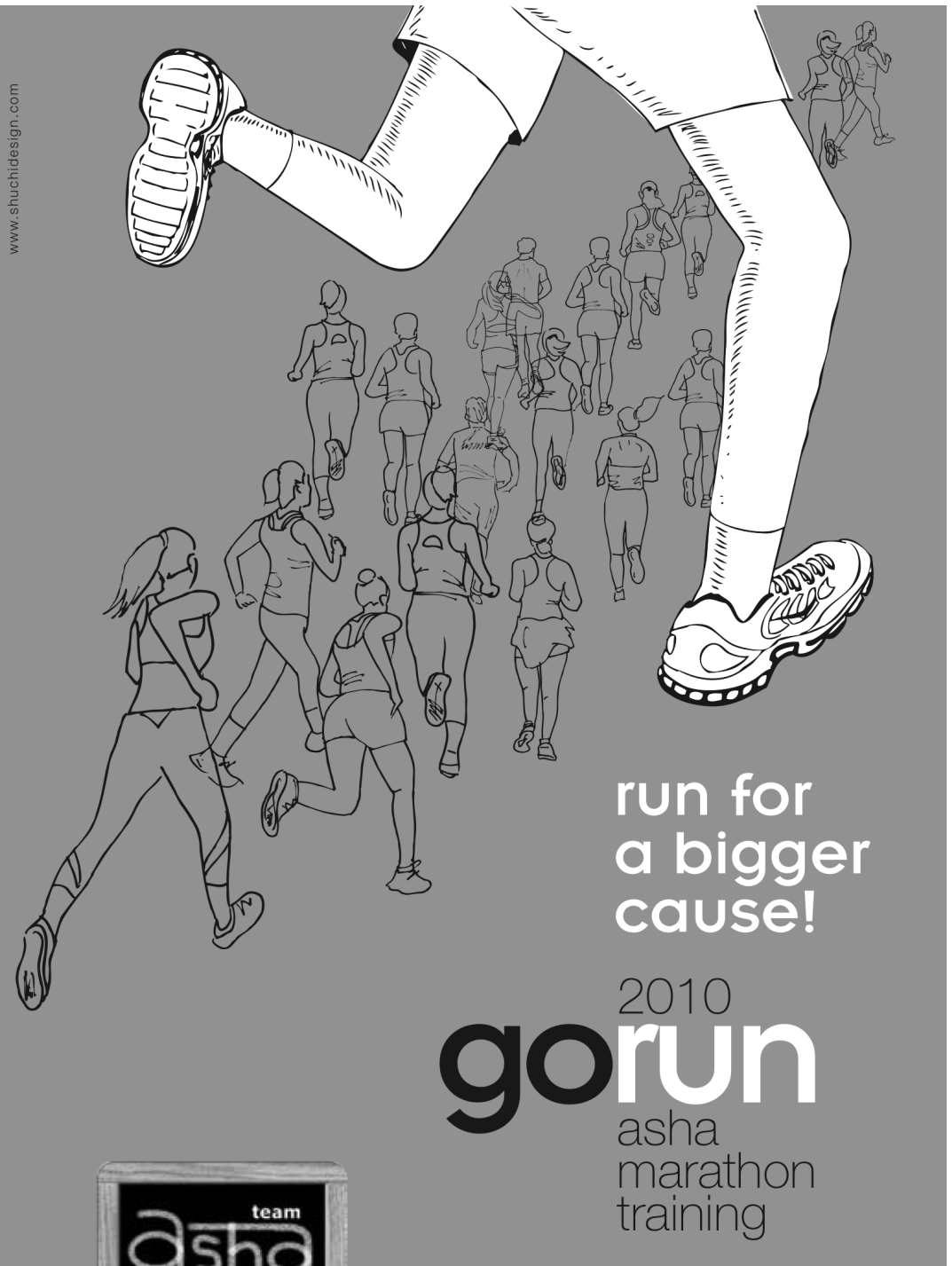
Team Asha has assembled an awesome team to help you each step of the way. There are coaches like world-class marathoner Tony Fong, Ironman tri-athlete Rajeev Char and ski-marathoner Martina Koldewey, mentors in each neighborhood to address your day-to-day concerns, and dozens of volunteers to plan your logistics for the weekend runs and races. All one has to do is show up!

In my fifth year as a Team Asha coach, I am humbled by the caliber of people around me and honored to be a part of the Asha family. So, come on and join the fun. It will be the best move you make in your life. I would implore each and every one of you to take the trip. Either sign up to run a marathon today or support someone who does.

Happy Trails!
Coach Raman

**Team Asha is a premier half-marathon and full-marathon training program organized by Asha SV. To learn more about the program, please visit <http://sv.team-asha.org>.*

“The important part of marathon training is to enjoy the journey.”



run for
a bigger
cause!

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asha
marathon
training



<http://team-asha.org>

Asha for Education, Silicon Valley Chapter
P.O.Box 641741, San Jose, CA 95164-1741
<http://www.ashanet.org/siliconvalley>
Email: sv@ashanet.org