

Vidya News

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Vidya is a U.K. registered charity (number 1084436) which raises funds for the education and training of children and students from disadvantaged communities in India. For more information on Vidya's work, please e-mail ramesh@vidya.org.uk or visit www.vidya.org.uk.

2001-2011: Ten Years of Vidya!

It is now ten years since Vidya was established to raise funds for the education and training of children and students from disadvantaged communities in India. Named after the Sanskrit for knowledge, Vidya's trust deed was approved by the Charity Commissioners on 10 January 2001. The current trustees are Ramesh Kapadia, Carol Donoughue, Sujit Kapadia and Anjali Shah, and the charity's patron is Edward Davey, MP and currently Minister for Employment Relations, Consumer and Postal Affairs.

Over the past decade, we have provided substantial support to Aseema's Education Centres for Street and Underprivileged Children in Mumbai (Bombay), and a primary school for tribal children in Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu, in conjunction with the Nilgiris Association for the Welfare of Adivasis (NAWA). More recently, we have taken on several other projects, including a primary school in a remote part of Uttarakhand (see page 3) and a project to teach English to deprived children in Ahmedabad (in Gujarat).

The trust was originally set up in memory of Victoria Armstrong, who was one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (Schools) by two fellow HMI – Ramesh and Maggie Hollingsworth. Following a visit to Tamil Nadu in 1966, Victoria was so struck by the plight of the poor tribal people (Adivasis) that she founded NAWA, devoting the rest of her life until her death in 1998 to improving their health, education, and quality of life.

One of Vidya's first aims has been achieved – a primary school has been established by NAWA



Class at the M.M Kanyavidyalay school in Ahmedabad

in the grounds of the house which Victoria bequeathed to the community and a new building also constructed. Many people have visited the school, including Ramesh, Sujit and Carol, Beryl Pratley and Cavery Bopiah. Our reports have helped NAWA develop the education offered and broaden the curriculum.

In 2002, we noted that Aseema had been given the use of part of a run-down local elementary school with falling rolls, and were increasing the numbers. This has been a real success story and Vidya is pleased to have been there since the start. Aseema has now adopted three local schools and increased enrolment and the quality of education at each of the schools, using ideas suggested in our evaluation reports. It has also recently established a centre for rural education in Igatpuri (see page 6). While Aseema has raised the majority of funds locally for its ventures, Vidya has contributed about £50,000 over ten years to support various aspects of its work, most notably an educational social worker, who has increased and maintained attendance, but also new projects such as an art teacher and Kindergarten classes. Carol and Ramesh have

visited regularly and produced evaluation reports, including for the Wingate foundation which has given two consecutive major grants stretching over a total period of six years. Very recently, following a suggestion from Carol, we have sent money to purchase English books to encourage more reading.

Vidya has also worked with a women's group providing education for disadvantaged girls in Ahmedabad. We have plans for further work on vocational and computer education. Recently, Anjali visited, seeing some English teaching and coming back with suggestions for future funding.

Two years ago, Zindagi (an Oxford-based student charity) joined with Vidya to continue support for a primary school in a remote and underdeveloped part of Uttarakhand. We are also working with Tata in an ambitious project to develop DVDs to teach English across poor municipal schools in Mumbai.



Children at the primary school in Uttarakhand

Evaluation and Finance

Our current annual expenditure is now over £10,000, with income sourced from regular donations, fundraising events and grants from various bodies. All the money contributed by individuals has been used directly to fund our charitable work. Some of the money we have received from tax refunds (Gift Aid) and external organisations has been used to support our evaluation work, which is an essential component of being a charitable trust. In total, around 85%-90% of the money we raise is spent directly on our projects.

A key element of our work has been evaluation of how the money we send is actually used. We only work with partners who are registered charities in India and supply audited accounts. Our evaluation is first-hand and independent, with trustees and sometimes other independent organisations visiting. We also require an annual report and accounts of how the money has been spent. Finally, we aim that projects should become self-sustaining, so that we sometimes cease funding and encourage local sources of support.

Future

In ten years, we have grown to become a charity of modest size helping carefully selected projects which are regularly evaluated and monitored. For the future, we hope to continue raising money from external sources, but relying heavily on fundraising events and individual supporters and donors.

We plan to grow, perhaps to an expenditure which becomes closer to a six-figure sum, but this would require more direct involvement of a few more people who are willing to work hard and/or with good contacts. *Why don't you join us to ensure an even more ambitious second decade?*

Finally, in no particular order, we would like to thank a number of individuals and institutions that have helped us in a variety of ways: S Agarwal, Cavery Bopaiah, BH Kapadia, K Vijayakumar, Shweta Kapadia, N Murali, Beryl Pratley, C Raju, Edward Davey, Dilbur Parakh, M Alwas, Robert Cassen, Tom Day, Terance Marion, Sarojben Kapadia, Maggie Hollingsworth, Rosaleen Mulji, Charu Jalundhwala, Barry Hitchens, Nick Martin, Guinness family, Sally Youngs, Colin White, Peter Stokes, Kamaljit Sood, Harpreet Arora, Yamini Paramesan, Zindagi India, Unilever, Bank of England, PWC, Oxford University, Balliol College, Wingate Foundation, Madeline Mabey Trust and Change Charity Fundraising. Most of all, thanks to each and every one of you as our supporters.

Ramesh Kapadia

A School in the Himalayas: Zindagi Swajan Siksha Samiti Ghati

Zindagi India was founded as a student society at Oxford University in April 2002. It was run by students with input and assistance from previous members who had graduated from the university. In early 2010, Zindagi India opted to come under the Vidya Trust.

Like Vidya, Zindagi is dedicated to funding educational initiatives for poor communities who, on their own, are not able to attract funding because they lack the necessary institutionalisation, access and skills. Zindagi believes it is with grassroots educational initiatives that even the smallest donations have the biggest impact. From the start, it has believed that working with these communities as full partners and emphasising measures that avoid donor dependencies is the best way to make projects self-sufficient.

Zindagi India has funded the construction of two schools in rural northern Uttarakhand province, in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas, and continues to support one of the schools in its day-to-day running.



The mountainous terrain of Uttarakhand

Most families in the villages live off animal husbandry and farming their own small plots. This is sufficient for sustaining themselves for about 8-9 months of the year. The rest of the time they have to buy their food. Apart from selling their small quantities of milk and vegetables in the market in Mussoorie, a hill-station about a four-hour jeep ride away, there are few opportunities to earn an income.



Assembly at Swajan Siksha Samiti

Zindagi's first project was the construction of a primary school, Swajan Siksha Samiti, in Ghati, a poor village in Uttarakhand. Ghati is surrounded by five other villages in a 2km radius, with a total population of about 1,500. Because Ghati and neighbouring villages, Chotty and Thapala, do not have primary schools, the community had, in early 2002, started its own initiative to educate the children. They formed a village education committee (VEC) – a group of 14 elected parents – who cleared some space as an open-air classroom and hired Sanjay, a teacher from another village. Classes had to be suspended during the monsoon rains and during the harsh winter. The only remuneration they were able to provide Sanjay was food and shelter.

The Ghati initiative stood out because of the strong commitment shown to the school over the year. Zindagi has provided funds for two full-time teachers and a school building since July 2003. The VEC agreed to provide some of its communal land for the school building for free and the community provided free labour during the construction process and for maintenance thereafter.

Sanjay has continued to run the school in his role as principal and works closely with the VEC. The language of teaching at the school is Hindi. The curriculum taught has been developed by Sanjay based on principles learnt from Government courses as well as those developed by the Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH), a grassroots NGO in the region.

The school now has 100 students and six teachers. Classes taught are for years 1 to 7. In 2010, six students sat for and passed the state-wide entrance exams to get into a government secondary school. The school has also been active in getting the children (and parents – see picture below where a parent is teaching the children the moves) involved in extra-curricular activities. Students have participated in a number of state-wide and national cultural competitions and won prizes.



Students practising for a cultural programme

The second project that Zindagi India supported was the reconstruction of a school building in Gharkhet, another village in Uttarakhand, India. In 2004, the school had 120 students from ten different villages attending classes. The accommodation was a very basic structure, consisting of loose rough stone walls covered by a tin roof, with no glass windows, electricity or running water. The roof did not protect the class against the harsh winters or the summer heat as it exacerbated both low and high temperatures. The school had grown in popularity, but there was no more space to accommodate more students. Zindagi India therefore decided to fund construction of a solid building in 2005. This project was a one-off assistance, but the school has benefited tremendously – the number of students has doubled and the school has been very successful in regional competitions.

Anjali Shah

Girls Learn to Speak English

For the past couple of years Vidya has funded a part-time teacher, at a cost of about £1,000 per year, to develop spoken English in a school in Ahmedabad for girls from poor communities. M.M Kanyavidyalay at Kathwada is a school for girls in Standards 8-10 (aged 14-16). Vidya observed the classes and offered suggestions for improvement. Subsequently, our local partner organisation, AJSKS, has sent brief evaluation reports.

In 2009-10, there were 79 girls in Standard 8 and 50 in Standard 9. On the first general test, 10% got an A and 50% a D, on general questions about introduction, friends and family. Some grammar was introduced such as nouns and adjectives and further work was done on dialogue, such as doctor and postman. Only 20% got grade D on the second test. The next sessions were on tenses and dialogue related to habits, leaders etc. In the final examination, the results were much improved with 35% A, 35% B, 20% C and 10% D.

AJSKS also run crèches throughout the city for poor children. Vidya decided to support this work by donating money to buy a set of toys for each crèche at a cost of £15 per set of ten toys.

Ramesh Kapadia

Fundraising for Vidya!

Are you interested in helping with Vidya's fundraising work? There are many ways you could support us, from helping to organise a fundraising event, to doing a sponsored activity, encouraging friends to make donations, or simply telling us about potential grant-making bodies which we could apply to.

If you would like to help in any way or have any ideas, please e-mail Sujit Kapadia (sujit@vidya.org.uk) or Anjali Shah (anjli@vidya.org.uk).

Aseema's Pre-Primary Classes

Ramesh Kapadia visited Aseema in January 2011 and wrote an evaluation report for the Wingate Foundation, which, through Vidya, provides a substantial grant to fund the 'Jal' class at Aseema's pre-primary centre. Carol Donoughue subsequently visited in March, seeing classes at all three schools supported by Aseema and also going to the opening ceremony for their new rural education centre at Igatpuri (see page 6). Below, we summarise some parts of our reports and the annual report from Aseema. We are continuing to fund the good work being undertaken and have also made a few suggestions for improvement.

Jal Success with Wingate Support

Thanks to the generous support of the Wingate Foundation, 53 children from the 'Jal' pre-primary class are able to access quality education. Aseema's pre-primary Centre equips children aged 2½-6 years with age-appropriate skills such as literacy, numeracy and social skills required to begin formal schooling at the age of 6. This year, 14 children from 'Jal' have graduated to Standard I of the Pali Chimbai Municipal School supported by Aseema.

The children have learnt concepts related to sensorial development (e.g. big-small, heavy-light, colours etc), language (phonics, reading, writing), arithmetic (number concepts, counting, addition, subtraction, etc.), culture (geography, environmental studies, etc) and practical life (how to keep one's surroundings clean, how to do simple everyday tasks etc.) This has enabled the children to develop social skills by learning how to work in groups, interacting with others, and – most importantly – adjusting to a classroom environment.

Almost all of the oldest children can now read simple books like the Ladybird series, and can write 3-5 letter words and simple sentences. In mathematics, most know the number hierarchy and can also perform simple additions. The younger children know the vowels and a few consonants in order to begin preliminary

writing, and build their vocabulary through picture talk, stories and I-Spy. They are able to count numbers up to 20 and explore basic geometrical ideas.



Children in the 'Jal' class

Two new subjects have been introduced. Hindi is taught through learning of songs, poems and rhymes. Older children are also introduced to the Devnagiri script through sandpaper letters. This has helped the children to feel more comfortable in the school environment by hearing their mother tongue. It also gave children an opportunity to hear the language being spoken correctly instead of colloquially. A special dance teacher comes once a week to practice simple dances, music and movement. The children look forward to her class greatly and enjoy expressing themselves freely. The dances learnt by them were demonstrated at Aseema's Annual Day in March 2011. Other extra-curricular activities, including sports, judo, music, Yoga and art, make school a fun experience and contribute to the overall development of children.

The children have been on excursions to the Aarey Milk Factory, a poultry farm and the nearby Rajesh Khanna Garden. Using a grant from the Vidya Trust, the school playground is now being constructively used for the Annual Sports Day and the Annual Day. On Sports Day, children participated in races and performed judo. The highlight was the fiercely fought cricket match for the older children.

Ramesh Kapadia

Igatpuri: A New Vision for the Future

I visited Igatpuri, the site of Aseema's new rural education centre in Maharashtra, for a stupendous opening ceremony on 26 and 27 March 2011. It was a star-studded event, dominated by inputs from pupils rather than celebrities, though a few of those were also present. The new venture is a site in an open area with much land available, in stark contrast to the streets of Mumbai. It will offer care with education to some of India's most deprived children in a rural setting. It has been many years in planning but the dream is now coming true. The performance at the opening ceremony, consisting of a good display of singing, dancing and yoga by the children, demonstrated that they are learning well.



Aseema's Centre at Igatpuri

There is already an anganwadi (aimed at children not yet ready for Standard 1) on the site in a separate one-room building, with a pleasant verandah. This attracts about 50 pupils from the outlying villages and is run by two trained teachers and three assistants who are trainees.

When the school opens, there will be at least 75 children on roll, and possibly more now that the villagers have seen what the children can do. The building itself is most attractive. There are three large classrooms, a hall, a library, a staff room and an office. There is an

open courtyard and an open stage. In addition, there are two dormitories which can be used to accommodate visiting staff. A bell tower beckons all to visit! All the visitors were extremely impressed. So was I.

Carol Donoughue



Children at the Igatpuri Centre Inauguration

In Brief...

- Vidya held its ten-year anniversary **fundraising dinner** in March at Dishoom, a 'Bombay café' in central London. Sixty people attended and everyone had a good time, enjoying the excellent food. About £1,500 was raised for Vidya.
- Vidya has made a small contribution to support the development of **educational DVDs** for deprived schools in Mumbai. The initiative is run by the large corporate Tata group in collaboration with the Bombay Community Public Trust. It aims to produce visually attractive, stimulating materials to help primary school children learn spoken English. Vidya has given modest financial support and is helping to evaluate progress and make suggestions for improvement, not least to help ensure that the DVDs are actually used. The project is currently at an early stage, with DVDs for the first two years just completed.

The Vidya Trust (www.vidya.org.uk)

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