

## ANNUAL REPORT 2007-08

*To laugh often and love much;  
to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the  
approbation of honest critics; to appreciate beauty; to give of one's self; to leave the  
world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social  
condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know  
even one life has breathed easier because you have lived--that is to have succeeded.*

*--Ralph Waldo Emerson*

There is so much we hope to teach our children that extends far beyond their academic life. Even as we are caught up in the immediate demands of curriculum, lessons and exams, we cannot afford to forget our greater responsibility towards our children. We owe them an education that teaches them about themselves and their world. An education that equips them not only with knowledge, but also the life skills to use that knowledge effectively. We owe them a secure and engaging school environment. An environment wherein they may recognize their worth and give direction to their limitless potential.

This year, as before, we have strived towards these goals. Emerging through the numerous challenges and triumphs, we believe we have strengthened our commitment to the children and their best interests. We present before you, our well wishers, glimpses of the year 2007-2008.



- **Pali-Chimbai Municipal School (Std. I-VII)**

The Pali-Chimbai Municipal School was adopted by Aseema in 2001. Since the adoption, the school has been transformed into a 'model' for education in Mumbai. In addition to academic learning, the children in the school also avail of several co-curricular facilities such as art, music, sports, judo, etc.

In October 2007, the BMC gave Aseema the responsibility of Std. VI-VII for the first time. With the placement of Aseema teachers in both these classes, we can now assure quality education to children right up till Std. VII. This year, the school catered to about 426 children from Std. I-VII. The average attendance for the year was 77.8%. This high rate of attendance was achieved with the help of our community work initiatives. It was

also supported by the donation of a school bus to Aseema. This bus now brings the children to school everyday who are most eager and happy to ride in it.

Throughout the year, the teachers aimed to cater to the children at a level that was comfortable for them. Children who needed special attention, were assisted by volunteers and an effort was made to make learning simple and fun.

The emotional needs of the children were also given special emphasis. Under the guidance of an experienced child psychotherapist, a three tier programme was developed for children with emotional difficulties. Group meetings were held with teachers and the school counsellor to help them address concerns in the classroom. A 'Buddies' programme was also set up between volunteers and a few children. Finally, children with more urgent needs were referred for therapy.

In the course of the year, the children had many occasions to celebrate and showcase their many talents. One such occasion was our annual Sports Day held in January. This event was a remarkable display of the sporting abilities and team spirit of the children. Every child was part of a team race, drill or judo display. As each child was competing primarily with him/herself, every little victory was applauded. Aseema's Sports Day was once again testament to our belief in integrated learning and in ensuring that every child is made to feel special.



The Amar Inam Annual Day held in March was also full of festivity. This Annual Day marked ten years of Aseema's work for children. A musical concert was held at St. Andrews Auditorium and every Aseema child had a part to play. The children were helped to translate their thoughts to words and beautiful songs were especially developed. A large-scale concert was prepared and the children performed confidently on stage.

They were cheered on by an audience of over 800 parents and well-wishers. It was indeed a proud moment for the parents to see their children perform on stage.

The children also went on various field trips and participated in workshops on a range of topics. These helped make their educational experience more holistic in nature.

- **Pre-Primary Education**

Recognizing the vulnerability of the early years of childhood, Aseema has been actively involved in Pre-Primary education. The Montessori method is used by Aseema for children between 2 ½ to 6 years of age. Aseema's Pre-Primary set up is the only one

using this method for underprivileged children in India. The carefully structured program and specially designed equipment have worked wonders with our children.

In the year 2007-08, Aseema ran four Pre-Primary classes at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School – Montessori, Jr. Balwadi, Sr. Balwadi and Balvikas. In addition, two new classes were also set up at the Khar-Danda Municipal School and later shifted to the Santacruz (West) Municipal School. The total number of children studying in these classes was about 220.

Each of these classes maintained a low student-teacher ratio and catered to the individual needs of the children. The children were allowed to begin their journey of education in a warm, open environment. Every child had the freedom to explore the material and learn at his/her own pace.



The Pre-Primary set up has found significant success with the children grasping fast and enjoying school. Visitors to our school were able to witness this when a Montessori Exhibition was organized in October 2007. This exhibition was part of the centenary celebrations of the Montessori method and gave people a chance to see our children at work. This year, the average attendance for the Pre-Primary was 81.3%.

- **Support Centre & Activity Centre**

The Support Centre is Aseema's oldest programme and runs at St. Joseph's Convent in Bandra. All Aseema's children who are in mainstream schools, come regularly to this Centre. Here the children receive help with their homework and also learn art, yoga, music and judo.

The Support Centre has become a safe and enjoyable place for these children to spend their evenings constructively. This helps enhance their all round development and ensures that they do not drop out of school.

Aseema also runs an Activity Centre for children where they learn embroidery, knitting and crochet. The items they make are displayed and sold at various exhibitions. This year, the children of the Activity Centre made beautiful serviettes which were appreciated by all.

- **Education Centre for Tribal Children**

Strengthened by the experience gained in Mumbai, Aseema now intends to extend its services to the tribal children of Igatpuri. A fourteen acre plot has been purchased in



Awalkheda, Igatpuri where we propose to establish an Education Centre for Tribal Children. This Centre will facilitate holistic education and vocational training to the children of that region.

An aanganwadi has been set up in Jambhwadi, Igatpuri. The land for this aanganwadi was generously donated by Sitabai Kavji Mengal. This school was formally inaugurated on 15 July 2007. Aseema was joined by the staff

of Mahindra & Mahindra in Igatpuri to plant saplings on the land for the Education Centre. A well has also been dug on the land which provides much needed water to people of the neighbouring village.

The aanganwadi in Jambhwadi, had a strength of 30 children this year. Teachers from the local community were trained to work with them. The children have begun enjoying coming to school and are extremely sharp and quick to learn.

They were most delighted to participate in their school Sports Day and Annual Day and performed enthusiastically with the encouragement of their proud parents. The opportunities made available to these children through the school are immense. For the first time, children from this tribal community can avail of quality education and can look forward to a promising future.



- **Product Development**

Aseema's Product Division uses the art of our talented children to create marketable products. The beautiful paintings made by them, are showcased and sold in exhibitions across the city. They also are the inspiration for a wide range of products such as notebooks, mugs, trays, cloth bags, etc. The revenue generated through the sale of these products contributes in a small way to Aseema's expenditure on education. It is our goal to become self sustaining in the long run through the sale of our children's art.



This year, in addition to our previous products, some new creations found great success. A stunning range of greeting cards were made for Diwali. We were also able to secure orders for customized corporate gifting items for Diwali and we hope to build on this in the future. A new ladies cloth handbag with Warli art was also widely appreciated. The success of this bag then led to a mobile pouch, change pouch, pencil case, toilet case and spectacle case being made in the same design as

accessories to match the handbag. It makes an extremely attractive gifting combination for ladies. Our latest product was a folding bed table with a collage painting on it. This table may be used for dining, reading or even working on a laptop and was a hit when launched at the 13<sup>th</sup> Harmony Art Show – an annual event to which Aseema is invited.

Several corporates and schools invited Aseema to exhibit and sell these products on their campus. The wonderful support shown by each of them has helped us inch further towards our goal of self sustainability.

- **Staff Development**

The success of our programme depends greatly on the personal qualities of our teachers and staff. Our staff participates in several training programmes and workshops throughout the year to enhance their skills and knowledge.

One such programme was specially organized by the Sri Aurobindo Society in Puducherry. This education centre is structured around the approach of 'Integral Education' which has been adopted by Aseema. The teachers participated in workshops and discussions on a variety of topics ranging from teaching methods and techniques to yoga and appreciation of nature. Several of their wonderful ideas are now being implemented at Aseema - using music breaks to enhance assimilation of learning, laying emphasis on physical development, etc. The knowledge gained has not only helped teachers enhance their work but has also given them new insights into their own personalities. All the participants came back with a feeling of calmness, renewed zeal and a greater sense of purpose.

Another training session was organized by participants of the Top Management Programme of UK's National School of Government. This two-day workshop focused on team building and communication skills. With Aseema being on the threshold of so many new developments, this training helped our staff re-energize and prepare themselves for the academic year 2008-09.

- **Plans for 2008-09**

The year 2008-09 brings with it many new developments at Aseema. To begin with, a second shift of classes has been introduced at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School. This was done in order to accommodate the increasing number of children enrolled with Aseema. A second batch of classes will allow us to restrict the teacher-child ratio and ensure meaningful learning in the classroom.

Our entire Pre-Primary has now been shifted to the Santacruz (West) Municipal School. In the year 2008-09, we will run three Montessori Centres in two shifts and a Sr. K.G. class at this school. A lot of work has gone in to make the learning space conducive to working with children. An Art Room, Library and Dining Room are also being developed for the children here.

A major milestone for Aseema is also the establishment of a Secondary Section in the English medium at the Santacruz (West) Municipal School. There is at present, only one municipal school offering secondary education in the English medium. Our children graduating from Std. VII had to, until now, seek admission in private schools or discontinue their formal schooling. With the commencement of Std. VIII in Santacruz, they will now be able to avail of secondary education of the same high standard they were accustomed to.

In Igatpuri, the land for our Education Centre has been prepared for construction. We propose to commence building the Centre at the end of this year. In the meantime, our aanganwadi will extend its services to children in Std. I.

Each of these developments has been made possible by the generosity and support of our donors and well wishers.



The past year has been extremely eventful for us at Aseema. We have endeavoured, as before, to provide the very best of services for our children. We are so proud of the growth they have shown and invite you to witness it personally. Do visit our projects in Igatpuri and Mumbai and meet with our children. They are sure to amaze you with their bright eyes and big dreams. Those of

us who are fortunate to work with them everyday, have truly come to believe that –

*“All kids need is a little help, a little hope and somebody who believes in them.”*

*-Earvin "Magic" Johnson*

# Thank you!

## **SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**

American School of Bombay  
Apostolic Carmel High School  
Arya Vidya Mandir School  
Billabong High International School  
Ecole Mondiale School  
J.B. Petit School  
Jamnabai Narsee School  
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The Warriors of Hope  
Young Men's Christian Association

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who have stood by us over all  
these years.

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