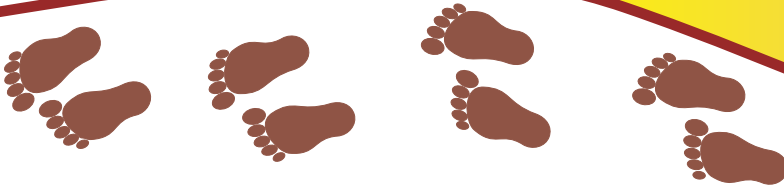


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Mumbai Mobile Creches Newsletter



Learning is Pinky's (above) and every child's right. We focus on the child on the construction site, and aim to reach 10,000 children by 2010. But there are many challenges and a long way to go before child-friendly sites are a reality.

On 7th February, a massive fire broke out in our BG Shirke Versova construction site. In a matter of minutes, 150 homes were blazing, and soon, completely destroyed. It was 4.00 pm. Everyone was at work and all 100 children were in our centre. Fortunately, there were no casualties, and our centre only suffered some minor damage. An email appeal sent out to friends saw an overwhelming response as money, clothes, vessels and help poured in. Within twenty four hours, we had collected several times more than we needed! Over the next few weeks, we distributed 150 kits which included rice, dal, clothes, sleeping mats, blankets and sheets, small and large cooking vessels, mugs, spoons and two storage tins for water and food. Our deepest gratitude to all our friends who called and supported these families.

Fires are not uncommon in construction sites. We reach a few thousand children a year, but what about all the other construction sites that don't have any centres? Over the last six months, we visited 20 such construction sites and found nearly 800 children. We have sensitized six new builders and are hoping to open 10 centres. But, very often, our staff is not even allowed to enter a site to check if it has children. Maharashtra is yet to implement the Construction Workers Act that mandates day care. Clearly there is still a very long way to go before all children on all sites can be safe, healthy and educated. It is a very sobering thought.

From site to flight: Off to Hong Kong!

In February, we received a wonderful surprise. A puppet show on the importance of mangroves prepared by six children (right) in our Bhakti Park centre, coordinated by an NGO partner, Conservation Action Trust (CAT), was selected for an international award! The entry had been chosen by Wetland Link International-Asia network from conservation projects in which 22 secondary schools from seven countries in Asia participated. Ours was the only non-formal school and yet our children were among the winners! A team of six (one teacher and four children along with a CAT representative) has been invited to Hong Kong to receive the award. A special thanks to our friends at CAT for making the entry and organizing the funds. We were also very lucky to meet a sympathetic Regional Passport Officer who agreed to cut the red tape. We are extremely proud of our stars-it will be such an incredible adventure for them!



A few days before the Hong Kong award, six children from our Versova centre won second place in an Inter-NGO theatre competition organized by students of NMIMS College. In fact, theatre is an important component of our curriculum and the bal sabha programme where children from one site prepare skits and present their work to communities on construction sites, is a regular and much loved event. This programme is coordinated by Kishan Mantri, who used to be a watchman on our Patlipada site but is now an invaluable member of our team.

**Special thanks to Kalpataru Trust for a 30 lakh donation...
It's the single largest ever!**

Some innovations and developments

Pragna Maniar, a pre-school teacher for the last 16 years, has recently joined us. After spending the first three months visiting all our centres, she ran a preschool programme in our Evershine centre for two months developing the themes 'Myself' and 'Homes' to pilot her innovations. "First I thought, I've been teaching for so long, what can I learn that's new?" said Teresa (right), the preschool teacher with whom Pragna worked. "Then I saw all the new things she wanted me to do and I said no way!! I can't do that. I'm going to have to leave MMC. But after a week, I started to really enjoy her activities and when I saw how well the children responded, I was so happy! Now I feel I don't need her, I can manage it all myself!"

Over the next year, Pragna will help MMC to strengthen 20 themes, introduce new teaching aids, and expand the "3 R's



Reading, wRiting and 'Rithmetic" school preparedness component of our curriculum. Pragna has also developed monitoring mechanisms to measure the impact of each theme on the children's understanding of key concepts.

Expanding our reach...

In September 2006, the Supreme Court mandated that all children under six be covered by the Government's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). The ICDS runs preschools for three to five year olds and also provides supplementary nutrition and health services for children under three. But, so far, the ICDS has never reached children on building sites. Last October, with the support of Bhavishya Alliance, an NGO that builds multi sector alliances to eradicate child malnourishment, we met with the ICDS to see how the construction workers' children could be included. A very supportive Commissioner, Mr. Ujwal Uke, immediately agreed to pilot two "mobile anganwadis" for over 200 children in partnership with us! MMC will run the crèche and non formal school, and ICDS will run the balwadi. Two sites have already been identified and we are going to train and include women on the site. We hope to sign an MOU with ICDS and Bhavishya Alliance by the end of April. It will be the first time the ICDS reaches such children, and we hope this will set a precedent for both the city and the state.



Fundraising and Friendraising...

Team Mumbai Mobile Creches (left)! Over 400 people ran for us in this year's Marathon and raised over Rs. 30 lakhs. Dressed in our yellow 'Futures Under Construction' T-shirts, we shouted slogans "Building ke sath zindagi banao! (Build lives along with buildings).

Also, a very special thanks to Mr. Vibhu Kapoor, who organized a charity art exhibition (right) from 19th - 29th February, to support us and Save The Children, India. Edelweiss Capital, Sula Vineyards and Indigo Restaurants sponsored the event. 50 artists exhibited their art and about 150 people attended the inauguration event. We were able to raise 10 lakhs.

And we've had wonderful new volunteers in the last few months -- Andrea, Jasmijn, Tine, Radhika, Mr. Patki, Ms. Harishchandra, Mr. Verma, Amitava, Aparna, Madhu, Ms. Chitragandha, Viren, Sylvia, Murray...friends for life!



The wonderful corporate teams that ran for us

HDFC Bank	Lodha Constructions
Macquarie Bank	Kohinoor Constructions
Citigroup	Hiranandani Constructions
AFL	UTV
Johnson Controls	Goldman Sachs
Taj Group of Hotels	

Our champions on the ground...mothers!

Arunbai was very suspicious of our programme when we first started up at Neelkanth. There was no way she was going to send her precious two year old daughter Bharati to any old school. After months of persuasion, Arunbai agreed to visit our centre for a few minutes. She was impressed and said, "I'll come once a week so Bharati can play with the toys. She doesn't have any at home." Soon, Arunbai was coming every day. Now, when she finds a child running around the site, she yells at the mother, "Don't want the best for your child? Send them to the school right now!!"



Pillars of strength.. Teachers make all the difference

Ramchandra Vittal Rao (right), from Andhra Pradesh, has been working with MMC for the last fifteen years. In fact, his parents were labourers on one of the sites, and he was seven years old when he first entered a Mobile Creches centre. Supported by MMC, he studied until the 12th standard, and was inspired to become a teacher. Ramchandra loves working with children on sites because he knows what it is like to be one of them. "I want to show them that if they study hard, they can become a teacher, a doctor, a police officer...anything. They should not be forced to remain where they are because they have no choice," he says firmly.



Two more stars!

When four year old Shraavan Lakshman first arrived at our Ozone Centre, he never took part in any activities. We soon realized that this was not because he didn't want to, but because he was too weak. Immediately, our doctor prescribed medication and put him on a special diet. As his health and weight improved, so did his spirits! Now he enthusiastically stands in front of his class to sing the songs he has learned. He smiles beautifully, and happily calls out to his teachers to let them know that he has arrived!

Sunny Bhushan Pandit's (right) mother did not know his age and he was so small that he was first put in our Balwadi (preschool) section. But he was clearly very sharp and soon was moved to the primary section and then brought up to speed to enroll in the local municipal school. In fact, he was so bright that he was admitted to the 2nd standard. His teachers gush: "When Sunny first arrived at our centre, he used to be scared. He didn't want to leave his mother. Now he's not even scared to attend the municipal school, even though he has to travel some distance to get there. He can complete any task given to him, no matter what it is!" When Sunny grows up he wants to become a police officer.



Targets for three years...strengthen, expand, evaluate..

In February, several workshops were held to discuss our vision for the next three years. Energy levels were extremely high and soon the slogan '10 by 10' was adopted with much enthusiasm- we hope to be able to reach 10,000 children by 2010. Every MMC team member participated and collectively set targets for the organisation, each centre and each individual for the next year. Mr. Verma, an HR specialist with 36 years of experience in the Tatas, along with Amitava (also from the Tatas) and Aparna, led the workshops, and even visited our centres to help set up a Performance Management System. Over the course of the year, they will be helping us strengthen our Human Resource policy. As we have said before, teachers are our biggest assets, and we must ensure that they are helped to achieve their full potential.

From construction worker to MMC teacher...

Last October we started training 22 women who live on construction sites to become teachers. While we initiated this project to increase community ownership of child care and create a cadre of leaders who could champion this cause on the ground, it has turned out to mean a lot more. One of the trainees, Savitha Nagtilak says, "I was scared to walk alone to a bus stop. Traveling by train was a nightmare. I was so dependent on my husband and couldn't make any decisions. But after I started attending the training programme, I have friends from all over the city, and I feel very confident. Now I know the whole of Mumbai. I can travel wherever I want to on my own. I really feel I am becoming an independent and confident person."



Hectic schedules. Here's a list of just some of the outings the children went on in the last few months:

Outing	No. Of Children	Partner
Visit to Atria Mall	50	Magic Bus
Drawing Competition- Traffic Park	15	Concern India Foundation (CIF)
Eternity Mall	50	Disha Foundation
Children's Art exhibition at Citigroup office Goregaon	25	Citigroup Global Services
Visit to Purnavas, NGO working with special children	21	Purnavas
Byculla Zoo	33	Syntel
Vegetable market	25	
National Park	39	Young Environmentalists
Warli Painting Exhibition	18	CIF
Museum, children's film at Max Mueller	50	
Workshop on Children's Rights	4	Vatsalya Trust
Children's Party at Olympia Grounds	150	Syntel
ANNUAL CAMP IN MARVE	382	
Camp in Karjat	16	Magic Bus
Sports Day	30	CIF
Nehru Science Centre	106	
Chowpatty – Dadar	19	
Screening of the movie 'Whales'	100	Magic Bus
Painting Workshop at the Kala Ghoda Festival	6	CIF
Sports Competition	14	Magic Bus
Maharashtra Nature Park	25	American School
Taare Zameen Par movie	25	Neptune Constructions



Thanks to the Durgas, a rock band from Europe, who went on a whirlwind two day MMC "site" tour. Who needs words when you have music?

Everyone looks forward to the annual camp at Marve beach when all the teachers and children spend two days and nights dedicated to having fun! We took 380 children between six and twelve years from all our centres – many of whom had never seen the sea before – for days filled with art, yoga, dance, theatre and games.



As part of our child to child programme, we partnered with the American School's Elementary section. First, their little ones visited our centre, then we went to theirs. Then all of us together went to Mahim Nature Park. It was so successful that even the 5th graders got involved!

