

BAL SHRISTI

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Indu Shahni, Sherrif of Mumbai, inaugurates the new Peninsula Centre for 85 children. Urvi Piramal, right, launched a MMC – Peninsula partnership and affirmed support for children on all their sites. As a first fun outing, we took the older children of this centre to visit the planetarium. We were amazed to find that it was these children's grandparents who had built the planetarium, where MMC had a centre twenty five years ago! One of the MMC alumni, whose children are now in our centre, proudly told us that it was because of MMC that he had learnt to read and write, and now he is a foreman on the site, earning Rs. 15,000 per month!

The world was a different place last September. The lead story in our newsletter at that time was how our expansion plan was well on track, and our goal was to reach 10,000 children by the end of 2010.

Within a month, a centre with over 100 children was forced to close. The builder had just run out of money. We have been forced to shut four centres in the last six months, and the number of children in our centres is 30% less than it was six months ago. Overnight, families were told that there was no work, and they were compelled to return to their villages. On the financial side, builders' contributions to MMC have fallen, and donations from the Mumbai Marathon, our most successful fundraiser over the last two years, fell by 60%.

While we begin this financial year on a somber note, and with our expansion plans on hold, we are grateful to have received extensive support from all our friends so that we can focus on consolidating and enhancing the quality and impact of our work. Our objectives will be to review, strengthen and document our curriculum for all three age groups; develop stronger monitoring and evaluation systems for collecting data and assessing impact; and increase community participation in our work. With reduced family incomes, our children need MMC more than ever. We hope to emerge stronger, if not larger, at the end of this year.

This issue of our newsletter emphasizes expanding relationships – with schools, NGOs, volunteers, donors, the corporate sector and the government – to champion the cause of the child on the site, and support young underprivileged children wherever they may be in our city.

FRIENDSHIPS ACROSS THE SEAS...

The children, teachers and parents of the United World College in Singapore have supported MMC for several years, and we owe special thanks to Tanaz Davar for introducing us to this wonderful school in 2002. At our request, Chris Fensom, the Principal of the Infant school, UWCSEA has written about this friendship.

“A very important component of the curriculum at UWCSEA is taking action to enrich the lives of others. Fund-raising events have included a Husathon, when the children were sponsored to remain silent at school and an evening's social event and auction of beautifully framed artwork painted by children from MMC. Another excellent example is a recent initiative amongst the Infant students whereby, instead of receiving birthday gifts from their classmates, our six and seven year olds have requested that a donation is made to MMC. Over the last two years approximately three lakh rupees has been raised in this way! The bond between MMC and UWCSEA was further strengthened when I, as the Principal of the Infant School, travelled to Mumbai a year ago and visited several centres. I was able to take photographs and videos to show my students in Singapore what life is like for a child who attends MMC and where the donations raised at UWCSEA end up. I was very impressed by the dedication of the staff and the quality of the learning that I witnessed in the two crèches that I visited. I started to develop an idea to provide educational, as well as financial support, for the teachers and educational directors at MMC. In March this year, Pragna Maniar, (MMC's pre-primary education coordinator) travelled to Singapore funded by the UWCSEA Global Concerns committee to investigate different curriculum ideas and ways of teaching. When Pragna boarded the plane to leave Singapore at the end of her stay she took with her a lot of new ideas, many new friendships and an extra suitcase full of books and resources donated by the Infant staff, students and parents”.

WITH A PROGRESSIVE BUILDER. Recently we were approached by Mrs. Sonal Shah of Marathon Constructions who was keen to adopt our model. We saw this as an opportunity to experiment a new idea rather than having child care outsourced to us. MMC assisted in setting up the space (technical advice on how it should be designed, what materials were required, support with accessing the materials and infrastructure), provided them with an MMC trained teacher; developed a fortnightly monitoring system for maintaining records and standards; and provided access to our monthly planning meetings and teaching aids. The trained teacher helped hire another teacher from the community, who continues to be trained on the job. For the first time, we provided technical assistance and consultancy while the project and concept were owned by the builder. On the builder's next site, the inputs will be better integrated with their system, so that they can open and run centres independently. We hope more builders will come forward in this manner to make child welfare an integral part of their policy.

WITH THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. In February this year, the Municipal Commissioner announced that the BMC would now see to it that all construction sites in the city had a school! It was wonderful news and we met the Deputy Municipal Commissioner (Education) who was keen to see MMC involved. In fact, MMC has been partnering with the Education Department of the BMC for several years to implement the Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan programme. Together, we ensure that children living on construction sites, who are out of school, can be brought up to speed to enter the local school. Recently it has happened that, even when a centre has officially closed, we have run classes for a few more months to complete the curriculum to enable children to sit the entrance exam. Indeed, it is the supervisors and Community Development Officers in charge of this programme who often approach our teachers to set up more courses. Many such officials spoke highly of MMC at a city-wide meeting on the planning of a survey of children on construction sites. The survey is now complete and we hope to begin implementation of its recommendations in June.

We also run SSA classes in the city of Thane. A few months ago, the Education Department of Thane sponsored a children's festival at our Patlipada centre. They also invited children from our Lodha centre to perform a puppet show on the environment at their local school for over 300 children. Earlier this year, the Thane Municipal Corporation had recommended our Patlipada centre for an award for the "Best SSA class in the city." We are yet to hear the results.

MMC Arithmetic

- 1** new centre was set up and **4** centres closed in the last six months
- 2** of our ex-students were featured in People's magazine March 09 issue
- 4** new construction sites were surveyed and **291** children found needing support
- 446** children attended MMC's Annual camp in Marve to enjoy two days on the beach
- 1700** people attended MMC's Lokdoot (street theatre) performances on various community issues

MMC Newsbytes

- We are supporting a local NGO called SNEHA to set up two crèches in a slum in Dharavi. These crèches have been added to their existing preschools and will have a special focus on addressing child malnourishment in the area.
- We are very proud of Gangaram Bombidi and Sadashiv Dhakane, our ex-students, who were featured in the March issue of People Magazine. A sailor in the Merchant Navy and a constable with the Arms Division of the Mumbai police, they have both come a long way!

DROP EVERYTHING AND READ!

In March, we received a grant from the Bombay Public Communities Trust to increase reading material available to all age groups in our centres, strengthen the language development component of our primary programme, and build our internal ability to assess and articulate impact. We have hired Rekha Menon to coordinate this programme.

Two exciting initiatives she is introducing are – Drop Everything and Read! (DEAR) and Let's Read Together. In DEAR, at 12.15 pm, everyone at the centre will have to read a book in silence for fifteen minutes. Children who cannot read words or sentences will picture read. In Let's Read Together which targets slightly older children in the crèche, two or three parents will be asked to spend fifteen minutes "reading" (pictures or the written word, depending on the parent's ability) to their child so that all the children reap the benefits once a month at the very least.



LOOKING AHEAD. The next few months will see increased efforts to help pregnant women on construction sites to have safe and healthy pregnancies and deliveries. Over the last few months, we have done detailed surveys of nearly 100 pregnant women across eighteen construction sites and held four focus group discussions. While the results are being analysed, there is overwhelming evidence that women are totally unaware of government services which could support them during this time.



GIVING MORE THAN MONEY, TIME...

Mumbai Connexions is an organisation of expatriate women in Mumbai who actively participate in various social initiatives in the city. Apart from donating money to us (from which we were able to buy many toys and teaching aids) they were keen to be more involved with the children and we asked them to create a curriculum for "English as a Second Language (or third as is the case with our children)." They are developing a detailed twelve-month module based on three levels of ability, which includes weekly plans, activities and teaching aids. Based on their experience with children at our Agripada centre, they are now starting this programme at another centre, and will eventually produce material that can be used as a guide for any volunteer interested in teaching English on a weekly basis. Kudos to the Mumbai Connexion group, and special thanks to Cynthia and Sarah for this incredible effort!

In the middle of the year, we had a volunteer from Spain, Sergio Nogales, who had completed his PhD in IT and wanted to spend four months in India. He did a complete IT audit of our work and updated our website and some hardware, introduced software and systems for data protection, trained us in how to manage and update the website, and changed our email system to make it more professional and efficient (please note our new email address). Even more important, he sourced education software which we could use to promote learning – mathematics, computer literacy, language, geography, social science –and which could be operated in English, Hindi and several local languages. Spurred by him, we initiated a donation drive for old laptops and computers, and successfully obtained 20, on which he loaded all the software. We are now about to launch this programme by training a few teachers, who will then pilot this project and later train their peers. We are also now actively seeking IT volunteers who can carry Sergio's work forward.



Fun at the zoo with KPMG employees!

The last six months has seen an outpouring of corporate and individual support for our work. During “Community Workers” month, Kuhu Banerjee, a Teach India volunteer, brought a policeman and a cobbler to the centre, much to the delight of the children. Four corporates need special mention – Convergys that has adopted our Patlipada centre, Syntel that has adopted our HCC and Chandivali centres, where both regularly holds educational as well as recreational activities; Nomura Capital, that sends a group of volunteers every week to our centres; and Candid Marketing, that sends volunteers daily to our Andheri centre to support our preschool programme. Many other friends who have sponsored events and gifts are listed below.

Activity

Fun at the swimming pool and magic show for Peninsula site children
 Career guidance fair for older children from various centres
 Text books for Pratiksha Nagar children
 Books and toys for children of Kharghar Centre

 Monthly environmental workshops for primary group children in seven centres
 Diwali party for children, regular employee visits and adopting Patlipada centre for CSR programme
 Painting workshop and auction to raise Rs.78,000; Christmas party, and organising weekly group visits to different centres since February 2009
 Visit to the zoo for Gundecha site children
 Diwali party; visit to Aarey Mill Colony; Sports Day; painting competition for HCC and Chandivali centres
 Educational visits; Ali Baba film screening; Sports Day for various centres
 Dental and eye camps for Agripada and Peninsula centres
 Helping spread the word about MMC and introducing new volunteers and friends to our cause
 Visit to Kanheri caves for Patlipada centre
 Christmas party and donation drive for Ganesh Nagar centre; ordering greeting cards of paintings by MMC children
 Immunisation camps for Chandivali centre and community
 Organising play on environment by our children and presentation at Kala Ghoda Art Festival
 Pottery workshops for Agripada children
 Outing to zoo and quiz for Kharghar children
 Regular visits and volunteering with Evershine and Versova centres
 Subsidised care and treatment for two special needs children from Ganesh Nagar centre
 Mumbai Marathon

Special Thanks

Breach Candy Swimming Bath Trust
 Don Bosco School
 Lion's Club of Dadar
 Rotary Club of Bayside, Rotary Club of Kharghar Midtown
 Conservation Action Trust
 Convergys India
 Nomura Securities

 Gundecha site office
 Syntel (India) Ltd.
 Concern India Foundation
 Rotary Club of Ghatkopar
 Atma - Mumbai, SOSVA, Teach India, YUVA
 Magic Bus
 Sutherland Global Services

 Dr. Neerja and Tunga Health post
 Nitin Das
 Bhau Daji Lad Museum
 KPMG Foundation
 Candid Marketing
 Umang Foundation
 Johnson Controls, Macquarie Securities, NYK Line

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