



Inspiring Social Change

AFP Newsletter

ISSUE 5

Sept 2008

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Mehfil, Music, Masti 1

Together we can achieve 2

Asian Businesses leading the way 3

Question time with the head 4-5

Hot Issues 6-7

Thought of the day..

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

AFP TEAM

Bala Thakrar
Director
Bala.Thakrar@affp.org.uk

Jayanthi Beliappa
Project Manager (India)

Sheetal Shah
Project Manager
Sheetal.Shah@affp.org.uk
(T) 020 7091 9348

ASIAN FOUNDATION FOR PHILANTHROPY

Registered charity NO:
1110180

Mehfil, Music, Masti

AFP's 2008 fundraising event brought in the crowds, combining the perfect cultural setting of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in West London with the musical programme of Arshad Malik and friends (below left). Attended by dignitaries such as Lord and Lady Dholakia, the event was complemented by a sumptuous buffet and a showcase of AFP's work which had crowds milling round the photo exhibition stands.

With musical influences from Bollywood to Ghazals, no-one was disappointed. To top of the entertainment, the Bollywood Angel Dancers (below right) got people on their feet and dancing along to popular Bollywood rhythms from the latest blockbusters.

The raffle draw was also a success with the first prize being a two night stay at the Old Waverly Hotel in Edinburgh. The winner Dinesh however, decided to auction off his prize to the highest bidder. When asked about his motivation, Dinesh replied, "AFP has supported so many people in its short history and I felt that if I can't offer the whole flower, at least I should give one petal as a token. The auction was one such small petal." The prize was eventually auctioned off to Vaheed Liaquat, who paid a generous £500 for the tickets.



With a successful evening and over £10,000 raised, AFP will continue its good work in India.

We have already begun preparing for the next fundraising event! Thank you to all our supporters and well wishers for making our evening a success!



Together we can achieve

Being a visually impaired woman in a male-dominated society brings many difficulties. However, Madhu Singhal has overcome all of this to set up Mitra Jyothi. Mitra Jyothi provides support and training to address the needs of the visually impaired. Disabled girls and women in India are generally seen to be a burden with little to offer society. Families are unsure how to support their loved ones and access to education and support services are limited. Mitra Jyothi provides valuable support and guidance for such women.



Madhu [centre left] with women who have successfully completed training

One of its most successful programmes supports them in further education and gaining access to employment opportunities. The self-confidence developed throughout the course enables the women to undergo massive transformations, and signifies the start of their journey for equality.

Asian Foundation for Philanthropy has been extremely delighted with the development of Mitra Jyoti and has sent volunteers who have supported with its training centre, reading programmes for visually impaired girls and administration work, all of which have been crucial to the running of such an important organisation. Returned volunteer Padmini Chauhan has great memories of her time with Mitra Jyothi:

“I was so inspired by the strength of the women I worked with. They were dynamic and independent, even though they faced many barriers.

Mitraangan is the latest in the series of achievements for Madhu. Although it took two decades to get there, the new purpose-built building for all provides a safe and accessible environment for Mitra Jyothi’s training programmes. To find out more about our partner organisations and how you can be a volunteer or donate to our cause, please visit our website at www.affp.org.uk

Asian Businesses: Leading the way

In our last newsletter, we were pleased to unveil our new Government funded project – Sudarshan, which will work with Asian Businesses that are thinking of/already investing in India.

How does Sudarshan Work?

Consumers are now increasingly aware of ethical issues and want to be more aware of where what they are buying is coming from. Poor employer practices have significant repercussions (see below) and this is what AFP through Sudarshan will support businesses to avoid. By engaging, educating and empowering businesses, they will lead the way for socially responsible business.

Learning from good and bad practice

In the past few months, news of bad business practices have been hitting the headlines. One of the most high profile ones has been the appalling working conditions in one of the factories supplying to Primark which exposed the shocking reality of the garment industry. As a result of the expose, Primark has had to mend a lot of bridges and start over in checking its working conditions. The loss? Capital, time, energy and the most important of all, consumer confidence.

The Sudarshan project works with Asian small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the UK to consider ethical issues and shares good practices of other successful experiences of other Asian SMEs such as Oxygen Healthcare (O2H), which undertake social responsibility in Ahmedabad.

Founder member, Prashant Shah, believes that for O2H, being a successful business is important but “We also have a role to play in our community.” Through its different schemes, O2H are clear in their objective “O2H does not try to solve anyone’s problems, it is about giving one’s love, time and energy now, and as a part of our life journey and not when we are retired.”

How Sudarshan has brought success

Naineshbhai Patel of UK based Farsan Ltd is building a food factory in Halol near Baroda to meet the growing demand for his successful food products. Production will start in 2008. However, certain considerations needed to be ironed out. Where can he get loyal and trained staff? What is his duty of care to his employees? How can he be sure the everything will run smoothly while he is in Leicester and the factory is in India?

To support Naineshbhai, AFP introduced him to our partner organisation Saath, which works with slum communities offering them training for life and placing them in suitable placements. Due to the commitment of this partnership, the factory will now be able to recruit staff that have been trained in health and safety, whereas Saath will now have an outlet for their trained students. AFP will provide support by sending an environmental health officer through its Paropkaar programme, and streamlining the social responsibility that the Factory should have to its surroundings through Sudarshan.

Question Time with the Head

For AFP specialist volunteer Kaushi Silva, her love for India knows no bounds. Having already had experience of supporting organisations in Chennai, Ladakh and Dharamsala, this July, Kaushi took a placement at Vidyanikethan school in Bangalore. Here she reveals all about her motivations and experiences in India.

Why volunteer?

“For me volunteering is all about learning – learning about people’s lives, their dreams, how they solve problems – and also about sharing my skills. As a Headteacher and now a School Advisor, I’m fortunate enough to have a fabulous job that I love. Working with schools and helping them improve, is what drives me – as a person and as a professional. I believe that if we can make our schools effective, then we can improve the opportunities and aspirations for future generations. Supporting a school like Vidyanikethan helps to give one group of children the best start in life and working with staff to develop their skills will help support generations of children.”

What were the challenges you faced while in India?

“My first job as a volunteer – especially as I was going in for a short time, first and foremost was to build trust. The teachers needed to be sure that I could make a difference to their school, that I was a competent professional who knew what I was talking about. They needed to know about my experience but most of all, they needed to see me teach. I don’t claim to have made huge changes to the way that the school functions – but we’ve certainly made a start as every drop of water helps create the sea.”

Most vivid memory?

“We had the opportunity to visit a number of the projects that Vidyanikethan run – the child labourers’ schools; the hostel for children of Commercial Sex Workers, the girls hostel at Sarjapur to name a few. The child labourers were particularly special as these young people bear their families’ problems on their very young shoulders. Many of them find attending school hard – as they could be earning money either by washing motorbikes, making joss sticks or tailoring. I’m not sure I would be able to persuade these young people that what they gain from school will eventually enable them to earn more money. So meeting Usman, a nine year old who goes off to work on a building site after school every afternoon, and is paid less than five Rupees for a six hour shift to help his parents earn a living is a memory that will never leave me.”





The lasting memory I will have will be of the staff team on my very last day. This is a team that has never managed to get to any event on time – every time we met I always had to go around and remind people several times before they arrived. At the first training session, some staff arrived about 45 minutes late. So when I arrived at 9.20 on the last day to start the session for 9.30, I almost fell over backwards when I realised that all the teachers were waiting for me. They said they wanted to prove that they'd learned something – I was chuffed!”

What will you take away from the experience?

“So much- it is clear that there are so many people around the world are giving so much when they have so little. When we visited some of the poorest parents in their very small homes, every single one offered us food and drink – despite not being able to afford to feed themselves. I also met several volunteers from the many ICT companies who offered to run activity sessions for the children – on a Saturday!



One of the principles that I live my life by is that of ‘Tendrel’ – the Tibetan concept of interdependence, which focuses on how the whole world is in delicate balance and we only survive by supporting one another.”

This placement has proved just how important it is if we recognise that all of us have skills to share and time to give, we can make such a difference to others’ lives, and our own.

Inspired by Kaushi’s story? Do you too want to make a difference to the world? Feel you have skills to share? Why not volunteer with AFP this November?

AFP is currently recruiting for its next cycle of volunteers to depart in November.

Download an application form and find out more by visiting <http://www.afp.org.uk/international-volunteering-programme/applicationprocedure>

Alternatively contact Sheetal Shah on 0207 091 9348 or email sheetal.shah@afp.org.uk

Deadline for applications is September 30th 2008.

Hot issues of the Month

Caste System: Does it exist in Modern India?

“Untouchables”, “Harijans”, “Dalits” – the name to describe the community may change, but the oppression and discrimination faced by the community remains the same. In 21st Century India, the caste system still has its role in society as Santosh Samal, (pictured) Executive Director of Dalit Foundation made clear in his presentation at Lloyds TSB. The Dalit Foundation works with the most marginalised communities in India.



Santosh’s presentation sparked off an animated discussion with people questioning the fundamentals of the caste system? What are its origins? Why does it exist? Despite the Indian constitution banning the caste system back in 1950, Santosh’s case studies made clear that it was still very much part of society. His experiences shocked the audience. There was disbelief that in a country where millions are reaping the benefits of a booming economy, there were millions more suffering from violence and discrimination.

The presentation highlighted the overwhelming interest the British Asian community has in the caste system and AFP hopes to hold future events to meet this need. The changes that we can make in our own thinking will definitely have an impact on the Dalit community worldwide, after all Gandhi said it best: “We must be the change we wish to see in this world”. Visit www.affp.org.uk/jagruti-development-awareness/ for full version of the talk, and for more information on the Dalit plight please visit www.dalitfoundation.org.

Pollute and Prosper: At whose cost? – Speaking out against bad practices

Close your eyes and picture this: water buffalo grazing on the banks of the river, flocks of birds pass idly through the blue clear sky overhead and villagers drawing their drinking water from fresh water wells, never having to question whether their water was clean or not. The village of Amarpurkashi in Uttar Pradesh was once the idyllic setting with River Aril replenishing the crops pictured.

The pollution of the River Aril, the main water supply

Fast forward 10 years and the picture is shockingly different. Today, the landscape has changed. With the influx of factories and industrialisation pervading deeper into India’s rural areas, the options for employment have certainly increased. In Amarpurkashi, paper and straw factories provided much needed income for many families. However, the costs to all villagers are clearly evident. No longer are there birds flying through the skies and no longer do people drink freely from their wells, instead questioning exactly what they



are drinking. With increased jaundice and asthma from the pollution, the company concerned now needs to address the damage and destruction it has caused.

AFP was pleased to welcome back Jyoti and Mukat Singh of partner organisation Amarpurkashi for their presentation on the environmental impacts of industrialisation in their area, held at Ernst and Young.

AFP's Jagruti talk aims to raise awareness of what international voice can achieve and this talk was no exception. Shocked by what they heard, the audience immediately engaged in a lively debate of how to take this issue forward, and many sent off letters to the local Indian politicians, which will give weight to the villagers plight. You too can be involved, simply visit our website or email AFP to find out more.



The farms of Amarpurkashi before the arrival of the industry



The crops and surrounding farmland as it is today

OTHER NEWS:



Channel 4 newsreader quizzes AFP volunteer

A question-time style event took place early this summer to officially launch AFP's and other diaspora organisations international volunteering projects with VSO and the Department for International Development (DFID). Returned volunteer Bansree Takodra (pictured) was interviewed by Jon Snow about her role as a diaspora volunteer and her experiences with Belaku Trust in India.

Leicester Mela - Here we come!

AFP will once again have a stall at the Leicester Mela on the 14th of September at the town centre, so bring your family and friends to learn more about AFP's work. Also sign up for the chance to win an exciting goodie bag.

You ask the questions

In conclusion, have you ever wanted to find out more about AFP, its volunteers, why we focus on certain issues or wanted to share an experience? Why don't you email or write to us with your questions and we will print the best ones in the next newsletter. **We want to hear from you!** Mail sheetal.shah@affp.org.uk with your comments and stories now!