

Activities Report
1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003



Introduction

“Life’s aspirations come in the guise of children”
– *Rabindranath Tagore.*

Taking inspiration from the above dictum we have been able to steer Aseema’s educational centre for street children into its sixth year. It has been a challenging and at the same time, a fulfilling and rewarding year for our teachers, volunteers and our children.

An important development has been the adoption of the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School in Bandra. In one year we have contributed significantly to the education programme and there has been a substantial improvement in the overall atmosphere at the school.

Aseema has just produced a film on Child Rights entitled “Raju and I”. This 26 minute animated film focuses on the right to education and deals with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, child labour and describes ways in which underprivileged children can be helped.

Education Programme

During the academic year 2002-2003 Aseema has been able to reach out to its children through the following programmes:

The Montessori Centre:

The Montessori Centre which operates from the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School and which started in August 2000 has been very successful. There were numerous requests from parents within the same locality to admit their children, so in June 2002 we started another Montessori class so that more children could take advantage of this centre. We now have a Montessori class for children aged 2 ½ to 6 from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and again from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. from Monday to Friday. The centre is fully equipped with Montessori apparatus and the children learn rapidly with two trained Montessori teachers. In addition, the teachers have prepared creative teaching aids which encourage learning. The Montessori class provides the children with a firm educational foundation which prepares them for mainstream education.

The Support Centre:

We have succeeded in placing most of our children in mainstream schools - both private and municipal. Every evening after school they come to our Support Centre at St. Joseph's Convent where besides studies they take part in many other activities, like art, yoga, judo, singing, drama and computers. Our dedicated teachers assist the children with their studies to ensure that they do not drop out of school and also liaise with the school authorities to discuss their progress in school.

Aseema teachers and volunteers observe the child to try and find out what he or she enjoys, what he or she has an aptitude for, and give the child extra attention in that particular field. Great emphasis is placed in shaping the characters of these young minds which will stand them in good stead for the future.

With the world veering towards computers and computer technology, we strongly feel that our children require to be computer literate. Since 2000, 20 of our children have been attending computer class at the Intel Cyberskool. Many of these little minds are quick to grasp the ABC of computers at a fairly rapid pace and have attained a high degree of "user friendliness" with the machines. In August 2002, St. Stanislaus High School set up a **computer centre** for Aseema's children and since then computer classes have been held there. This centre has six computers and thanks to a donation from a funder we have been able to purchase excellent software and other computer equipment.



Drama classes at Aseema started in July 2002 and are conducted by a graduate of the National School of Drama. This is the first time that drama classes have been conducted systematically and consistently at Aseema and they have helped in increasing the confidence and public speaking skills of the children. They have also instilled a sense of discipline and achievement in the children. Nine months of drama classes have culminated in a street play entitled “Sapno ki Duniya” on the right of every child to education. The children performed the play at the Carter Road Promenade and at the 8th Harmony Show and were overjoyed when their performance was appreciated.

Activity Centre:

The Activity Centre which started in September 2001 at St. Stanislaus High School is progressing well. The students are learning embroidery, knitting, crochet and make items which are displayed and sold at our exhibitions. At a recent exhibition a large order was obtained for the beautiful “batwas” made by the students.

This class is mainly attended by girls who are at an age when their parents are not keen that they continue with their studies in mainstream schools. Every effort is made by us to ensure that the girls continue with formal schooling and at the same time attend this class.

One of our older boys, who received training in making frames, is now passing on his knowledge to some of the other older children. We had him admitted to the open school at Jeevan Nirvaha Niketan where he obtained a double promotion this year and also learnt tailoring

Adoption of the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School

The Pali-Chimbai Municipal School has been run by the Bombay Municipal Corporation for many years yet it has not met basic education and safety standards. There are insufficient teachers (currently there is one BMC Headmistress and one BMC teacher for the seven standards in the english medium school) and the dropout rate is high.

Adopting the school has provided us with a challenging opportunity of working together with the BMC to provide meaningful and quality education to underprivileged children. During this academic year Aseema placed **two teachers** in the school who were responsible for Standards I and II and Aseema volunteers taught yoga and sports in other classes. A senior teacher from the Department of Pre-primary Education of Sophia Polytechnic assists the teachers in preparing teaching aids and educational material. We have found a substantial improvement in the students of those classes where we placed teachers. They started attending school regularly, enjoy coming to school and their attention span and learning ability have improved.

We believe that Aseema's **teaching approach** has helped in improving the educational standards and overall atmosphere at the school. This approach creates a special bond between the child and the teacher and once this bond is formed the child opens herself to learning and learns at a rapid pace.

What has also helped are the regular weekly meetings Aseema teachers have with our volunteer **child psychotherapist** who advises them how to deal with children who have particularly traumatic family backgrounds. Thanks to a donation by a funder we have been able to appoint a **social worker** at Aseema in April 2003 who will act as a link between the community and the school. This will help in increasing enrollment and ensure that the children attend school regularly.

Mid-day meals have been provided to all the children of the school which has helped in improving health and nutrition. Children particularly enjoy the cultural events and parties organized at festivals. A corpor ate house is assisting us with repair and renovation work at the school – mainly overhauling the entire drainage system and repair of the toilets. A water cooler and water purifier have been installed, thanks to a donation from another funder. Thanks to these improvements, teaching children about **hygiene and health** has now become much easier.

Applied art students from the Sophia Polytechnic Institute organized an **art project** with our little Montessori children. They painted on ceramic tiles which have been used to decorate the drinking water area on the first floor of the school. The

children from the Support Centre painted on tiles in their art class which have been used to decorate the drinking water area on the second floor.

In order to ensure that these facilities are looked after and properly maintained Aseema has employed a **watchman** at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School to ensure that no outsider enters the school (which frequently happened earlier) and who maintains the compound and cleans the toilets.

Another corporate house assisted with the **painting of black boards** at the school on the occasion of their company's world volunteers' day, provided a delicious meal and distributed pencil boxes.

Students from the Arya Vidya Mandir School came for an **interaction programme** with the students of the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School during the month of December. Students of both schools benefited much from this exchange and the students from Arya Vidya Mandir stated that they would like to have a similar programme the following year.

For the first time a **parent-teacher meeting** was organized at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School for Standards I and II in the month of December 2002 and again in April 2003. We were pleasantly surprised to find that most of the parents attended and were very interested in knowing the progress made by their children. At the meeting held in April, a small exhibition was also held where the work done by the children throughout the year was on display.

In February 2003, the students from the Rehamathbhai Habib High School performed a skit on **communal harmony**, "Oops Bomb Blast" which was greatly appreciated by the children of the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School. This was followed by a discussion on communal harmony

In February 2003, the children at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School were taught about dry and wet garbage and the importance of **garbage separation**. A compost pit has been created at the school using the BBC (brick, bagasse and cowdung) method with the help of a leading environmentalist from Bandra.

One of Aseema's students studying in Standards II of the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School won the third prize at the **inter-school annual craft competition** organized by the BMC.

A very positive development has been the setting up of a **library** at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School with the help of a committed donor and the students of the J. B. Petit School. Beautiful bookcases have been donated by a corporate house. A

wonderful collection of story and reference books makes studies interesting for the children and fires their imagination. A lending facility has been established and the students are taught to respect and look after the books they borrow.

Nutrition, Health and Hygiene

We continue to provide a nutritious meal to our children everyday. Since March last year, we have been providing a wholesome meal to all the children at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School. At festivals like Diwali and Christmas a special meal is provided to the children and since this year we have been organizing a small birthday party for the children every three months. Donations from funders and assistance from two organizations have made this possible.

As regards hygiene, the teachers pay special attention to see that the children come to school neatly dressed, with their hair tidily combed, and in their school uniforms and shoes.

Some of our young girl students have come of age, and, here again, our teachers and volunteers play a vital role in helping these girls to face this growing-up stage in as normal a manner as possible.

The renovated toilets at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School have helped greatly in instilling good habits and hygiene.

Our Doctor continues to attend to the children whenever required while a nursery school in Bandra organized a dental camp for our Montessori children.

There was a follow-up to the eye camp which had been held last year at the Lotus Hospital and several children were given treatment there.

Teachers Meetings

Teachers' meetings are held regularly to monitor the progress of each child and attendance in class. We have been fortunate in having a well-known child psychotherapist who visits us once a fortnight. She and our teachers have regular brain storming sessions, where problems regarding our children are discussed, and efforts are made to find some solutions so that the child's life becomes less tense, education brings about a sense of fulfillment and attending school becomes a pleasant activity.

Parental Involvement

We hold regular parent-teacher meetings, so that the parents get an opportunity to know and discuss their children's progress. Moreover, they also feel that they are a part of Aseema and have a role to play in their child's future.



Celebrations

This is one part in the life of every child at Aseema - which the children look forward to with great zeal and celebrate with gusto.

Republic Day, Independence Day, Teachers' Day, as also Children's Day are the highlights, with Diwali, Christmas and Birthdays also being celebrated.

One of our volunteers helps us by screening a good children's film, whenever an opportunity arises. In April 2002 she invited the children to view "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" where the children spent a most enjoyable afternoon with snacks and soft drinks arranged for, by the volunteer, during the intermission.

The annual picnic this year was to Shubhangi Holiday Resorts at Panvel where the children had a marvellous time on the water slides and play equipment.

Outings were to a cricket match at the Brabourne Stadium and to the Bal Vividha Festival 2002 where the children did a judo demonstration. The children also took part in an Interactive Workshop organized by 'Create' and Times Foundation. The children were also taken to the Concern India Foundation NGOngoing Mela

where they participated in a painting competition. Five of the six prizes were won by the Aseema children at this competition. The Aseema children also participated in the Sports Day for NGOs organized by Concern India Foundation at Priyadarshani Park. The Montessori children were invited to the “Milan Mela” organized by the Peridot Nursery School which they enjoyed immensely together with the children from the Nursery School.

Exhibitions

Aseema’s children continue to do very beautiful artwork and we have made many new products from their artwork, eg. address book, trays, hot plates, coasters, gift envelopes, key holders, key chains and T-shirts.

In April 2002 Aseema was selected by Reliance Industries to exhibit the artwork of the children and the products made from their artwork at the 7th Harmony Show. This show was at the Nehru Centre in Mumbai and more than 200 paintings of our children were displayed at the Nehru Art Gallery. The products were also exhibited and both, the paintings and products, were greatly appreciated by all those who visited the exhibition.

- During the course of the year Aseema took part in the following exhibitions:-
- 6– 14 April 2002: The 7th Harmony Show
 - 28 July 2002: St. Joseph’s Convent Ex-students’ Meeting
 - 14 August 2002: Exhibiton-cum-sale at Lintas
 - 29 August – 2 September 2002: The Giftex Exhibiton 2002
 - 21 October 2002: Exhibition at the Peridot Nursery
 - 25 – 27 October 2002: NGOnging Mela 2002 organized by Concern India Foundation
 - 15 & 22 November 2002: The Rotary Club of Bombay Pier Meeting
 - 26 – 28 November 2002: Exhibition organized by SSL – St. Xavier’s College
 - 30 November 2002: The Indus Exhibition
 - 13 – 14 December 2002: Christmas Bazaar organized by Bandra Gymkhana
 - 28 January – 4 February 2003: The Swadeshi Mela
 - 8 March 2003: Family Fun Day organized by the American School

The Wharton Business School, USA together with the S. P. Jain Institute of Management and Research, Mumbai are currently helping Aseema to formulate a business plan regarding the sale of its products.

Film on Child Rights

Aseema has just produced a film on child rights entitled “Raju and I”. It is a 26 minute animated film focusing on the right of every child to education. This film has been made primarily for well-to-do children studying in private schools to make them aware of the rights of underprivileged children. The film talks about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, shows the extent of child labour and describes ways in which every child can do their little bit to help less privileged children. We believe this film is not only for children but also for adults.

Conclusion

It is an uphill task for us to impart education to the most vulnerable segment of society namely street children. But we have taken it up as a challenge and continue to strive for success. We believe that the quality of education of our children today, will determine the quality of their lives in the future.

As has been said in one of the Scriptures,

*“Whoever destroys a single life
destroys the entire world;
Whoever saves a single life
Saves the world entire.”*

Many Thanks

We would like to convey our heartfelt gratitude to each and everyone of you, for your unstinted support and encouragement which you have whole-heartedly extended to Aseema over the years.

Also a very warm “Thank You” to all our staff, teachers and volunteers, for selflessly giving of their time to add a touch of joy to the young lives who come to us with hope for a brighter future.

To all of you thanks, and evermore thanks.

Thank You!

- * Almahaba
- * Astha Power Corporation Private Limited
- * Bombay Municipal Corporation
- * C. M. Charitable Trust
- * Concern India Foundation
- * Each One Teach One Charitable Foundation
- * EDS – Electronic Data Systems (India) Pvt. Ltd.
- * Godrej Industries
- * His Holiness Dr. Syedna Taher Saifuddin Memorial Foundation
- * Indian Textiles Company Limited
- * Inner Wheel Club of Bombay West Charitable Trust
- * Just Trust
- * Pali-Chimbai Municipal School
- * Peridot Nursery
- * Ratna Nidhi Charitable Trust
- * Reliance Industries Limited
- * Rhodha Textiles Private Limited
- * Samruddha Overseas Limited
- * Shashikant Dalal Charitable Trust
- * Sir Karsondas Vissanji Trust
- * St. Joseph's Convent
- * St. Peter's Youth Association
- * St. Stanislaus High School
- * Tablers Lucerne
- * The Bai Alamai and Seth Ardeshir Talati and Seth Sarosh B. Mody Charity Trust
- * The Bombay District E. C. Grand Charity
- * The J. B. Petit School
- * The Lotus Trust
- * The Vidya Trust
- * Twisha Consultants Private Limited
- * Ugar Sugar Works Limited
- * V. B. Haribhakti Charitable Trust
- * Vanik Association of the United Kingdom
- * Versova Vidyalaya Charitable Trust