

## Activities Report 2003 - 2004



### **Introduction**

And yet another year has raced by - like the Rajdhani Express speeding past railway stations.

We can hope for no greater reward than that our young boys and girls - the citizens of tomorrow - may find, in the days of their years spent at school, something to inspire them with an undiminishing zeal to bring about some improvement in the lives of their parents and in their own. After all, the function of education is to enrich the character. People cannot live by bread alone; the quality of life is far more important.

As per a Goldman Sachs Report in the Times of India dated 28 October 2003, "India has the most work to do in primary education.... it is high time that an educational emergency is declared." Giving and receiving basic education is a fundamental right. Even when all children are not born equal, they have the right to education of an equally good quality.

According to Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." We, at Aseema, try hard to follow this dictum. We make every effort to give of ourselves to others everyday - particularly to the most vulnerable section of our society - underprivileged and street children.

### **Education Programme**

#### ***The Pali-Chimbai Municipal School (PCMS):***

It is now two years since Aseema adopted the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School (PCMS) in Bandra. This year we placed one more teacher in the school taking the total number of **Aseema teachers** in the school to three. These teachers were responsible for Stds. I to III. In addition, an art teacher held art classes for the children in these standards. Aseema volunteers continued to assist the teachers and teach yoga. Our greatest reward is that our children enjoy coming to school - they attend regularly and their attention span and learning ability is constantly improving.

Our volunteer **child psychotherapist** continues to hold meetings with the Aseema teachers, advising them on how to deal with children who have particularly traumatic family backgrounds.

We have started an interesting project where we look into the **emotional problems** faced by the children. We have found that many of our children have very traumatic family backgrounds and the emotional deprivation that they suffer has its impact on them in the classroom. Unless some of these issues are addressed, to expect a child to grow, develop and learn in the classroom is almost impossible. Therefore, we must pay at least equal attention to the child's emotional needs. To address these issues we conducted a training programme (December 2003 to March 2004) consisting of **group counselling sessions** together with Muskaan, a Child and Adolescent Guidance Centre of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS).

In these sessions play therapy was used for diagnosis as well as treatment of children's problems. Sessions for the younger children focused on facilitating self-expression and self-awareness, enhancing social skills, and exploring emotional and psychological needs. While sessions with the older group focused on promoting the ten core "life-skills" i.e. self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, coping with emotions, coping with stress, effective communication and interpersonal relationship skills. The older group also discussed issues specific to this age group such as sexuality, and the setting up of future careers and vocation goals.

Aseema is now considering conducting similar sessions at the PCMS. In our opinion it is imperative that sessions on "**emotional learning**" be conducted alongside the academic programme.

We have been able to reach out to a greater number of families and children thanks to the regular visits of our **social worker** to the community. The social worker acts as a link between the community and the school and ensures that the children attend school regularly.

The Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) has acknowledged the good work we have done at the school and recently made available to us two more rooms to conduct our activities. In one of these rooms we have set up a **library** which has story books, reference and lending sections. For the first time the children of the school have had access to interesting and beautifully illustrated books and magazines.

In the other room we will be setting up a "**Balwadi**" for children aged 3 to 6 years to provide quality education at the pre-primary level. The Balwadi which will start in the next academic year will consist of junior and senior sections and will cater to children who are too old for the Montessori and too young for Standard I.

The school has been given a face-lift and our children have played a part in brightening up the school. Their artwork has been framed and prominently displayed in the corridors and on the staircase and the **renovated drinking water area** has tiles which have been painted by the children. This has been done under the guidance of art students from the Sophia Polytechnic and our dedicated art teacher. These tiles have helped to make the area bright and cheerful - a sight so rare to find in any Municipal School! The **renovated toilets** on the first and second floors of the school have helped greatly in instilling good habits and hygiene.

### ***Montessori Centre***

Montessori classes for children aged two and a half to six years continue to function successfully. A group of children are now ready for, and will soon be admitted to Std. I at the PCMS. These classes are conducted in two batches at a room we rent from the BMC in the PCMS - one from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and the other from 1.30p.m. to 3.30 p.m. We have found that the Montessori method provides the children with an excellent educational foundation which prepares them well for mainstream schools.

### ***The Support Centre.***

The Support Centre continues to function every evening at St. Joseph's Convent. All the Aseema children who are in mainstream schools (the PCMS, St. Joseph's Convent and St. Stanislaus High School) come regularly to this Centre. Here they receive help with their homework and also learn art, yoga, singing, drama, judo and computers. **Yoga** is a boon to our children - it has helped to calm them down and discipline them. They enjoy their sessions with our volunteer yoga teacher who has made them quite adept at some asanas and the chanting of mantras. **Singing, drama and judo** are also some of their favourite activities. These give them some respite from a dull and routine curriculum. The children gave judo demonstrations, which were greatly appreciated, at the Bal Vividha 2003 organized by Comet Media Foundation and at Concern India Foundation's annual ONGOing Mela.

### **Drama**

The Aseema children performed a street play entitled, "Sapno ki Duniya" on the right of every child to education at the Nehru Centre where Aseema was displaying its products during the Harmony Show, 2003; at the Amphitheatre, Carter Road Promenade, Bandra organized by the Inner Wheel Club of Bombay West; at Bal Vividha 2003 organized by Comet Media Foundation and at the World Social Forum 2004 at Goregaon, Mumbai. At each of these venues, the play was very well received and with every performance there was an increase in the children's confidence levels and improvement in their public speaking skills.

The students of the PCMS took part in a BMC Inter-School Cultural Competition in December 2003. It was the first time the children of the school were participating in such an event. Our volunteer drama teacher trained the children to perform a play, "Joy to the World" and to the delight of the students and their teachers it won the prize for the best script.

Not to be left behind, our little Montessori children performed a short play about the story of Christmas, before a small audience.

### ***The Activity Centre***

The students at the Activity Centre learn **embroidery, knitting and crochet** and make lovely items which are displayed and sold at our exhibitions. The students enjoy these activities so much that we are considering starting basic sewing and embroidery classes at the PCMS as well.

### **Celebrations, Field Trips and Outings**

Our children, like all of us, enjoy celebrations, outings and field trips. All major festivals are celebrated with enthusiasm, irrespective of boundaries of caste, creed or religion. They celebrate **Holi, Raksha Bandhan, Janmashtami, Ganesh Chaturthi, Dassera, Diwali, Id, Christmas and Makar Sankranti**. They are given a brief talk prior to the festivals, and told why it is good to observe them. Along with these festivals, **Republic day, Independence day, Teachers' day and Children's day** are also observed.

The field trips during the year included visits to **Jogger's Park**, a well-known landmark in Bandra; the **Fire Station** at Bandra Reclamation; The **Maharashtra Nature Park** at Dharavi and the **Bandra Post Office**. Our children are well-behaved and, therefore, well-received at any place of interest which they happen to visit.

During the course of the year, the children saw the following **films and plays** which they enjoyed enormously - "Koi Mil Gaya", "Its Showtime Folks", "Finding Nemo" and "Wallace" and "Gromit". We are grateful to all those volunteers and other well-wishers who made this possible.

The older children had great fun creating a mural during the Celebrate Bandra Festival in November 2003. In December they took part in "Chacha Ka Mela" organized by the Lions Club while the Montessori children thoroughly enjoyed themselves at the Milan Mela in March 2004. The Milan Mela has become a fun-filled annual event for them, very thoughtfully organized by the Peridot Nursery.

### **Picnic**

The most eagerly awaited trip is the annual picnic. Last May, the children spent the day at Shubhangi Holiday Resort at Panvel. They had a rollicking time, splashing about in the water, and enjoyed their snacks and lunch. This year it was decided to have the picnic in slightly cooler weather - so in February 2004, two bus-loads of our children went on a Picnic to the J. J. Hospital Nursing Association Complex at Aqsa. Here again, they spent the major part of the day splashing about in the pool. This year, we also took a few children from the PCMS to the picnic and they enjoyed the experience immensely. We are able to manage large numbers of our children on picnics, thanks to the assistance we receive from the mothers, teachers and volunteers, who are kept on their toes by the children.

### **Parent-Teacher Meetings**

Regular parent-teacher meetings are held to keep the parents abreast as to what is taking place in school, and to let them know about the progress of their children. At one such meeting, in February 2003, much to the delight of the parents, the students proudly performed the play, "Joy to the World". This function was also attended by some BMC Officers and Aseema funders. This was followed by the inauguration of the Library.

### **Health and Nutrition**

The children come happily to Aseema because they know that with us, they will be attended to from head-to-toe: haircuts, eye check-up, dental treatment, medical assistance and hospitalization when necessary. During the course of the year an **Eye Camp** was held at the Lotus Eye Hospital after which follow-up treatment was provided. A **Dental Campaign** was conducted by Colgate at which children were told about the importance of brushing their teeth and dental hygiene and they were given toothbrushes and toothpaste. Our volunteer **Paediatricians** visit our centres regularly and carry out a complete health check-up of the children.

A **mid-day meal** is provided to all the children at the PCMS and our Montessori children while all the Support Centre and Activity Centre students are provided with an **evening meal**. In addition from this year we have been giving our children a banana every day which has helped them gain weight.

### **Exhibitions and Sales**

The children continue to do beautiful art and many more products have been developed from their artwork.

An annual event which arouses a lot of excitement is the **Harmony Show** organized by Reliance Industries at the Nehru Centre, Worli. We have been invited to display and sell our products at this show for the past two years. On the inauguration day, Mrs. Tina Ambani invites our children along with some mothers, teachers and volunteers and, with her characteristic graciousness, hosts a lunch for all of us at the Nehru Centre.

This is a very special day for our children when the crew of various television channels interview them. The children exude great confidence, and with microphone in hand, answer all queries without any inhibitions!

The Harmony Show serves as a platform for Aseema to display and sell the beautiful artwork, as well as all the various products made from the artwork. The experience is a great morale booster - not only for the children but for all the adults who contribute their time and effort towards Aseema. Our products have become very popular, being of excellent quality. The art is carried out under the guidance and expertise of our art teachers who take great pains to bring out the best in their students. The children's work is also much appreciated by some of the artists whose works are on display at the Harmony Show.

The theme this year was '**Every Child Has the Right to Education**' and posters prepared for us by the students of Sophia Polytechnic were prominently displayed. Our film, 'Raju & I' on child rights was also screened at the inauguration.

The exhibitions and sales in which Aseema has taken part during the year are as follows:

**2003:**

- 4- 13 April: Harmony Show at the Nehru Centre organized by Reliance Industries
- 9 April: Open Day at Peridot Nursery
- 28 June: Felicitation programme of 40 Aseema students by the Indian Institute of Interior Designers (IIID) on the eve of their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- 7 August: Indian Merchants' Chamber, presentation on Aseema
- 11 - 16 August: HSBC Bank, Bandra Branch
- 16 - 17 August: Malhar Festival, St. Xavier's College
- 7 September: Mocha Films Club, Bandra
- 10 September: Bloomingdales School, Khar
- 21 September: Lions Club of Carter Road at Sir Pochkanawala Hall
- 22 - 27 September: The Standard Chartered Bank, Santacruz, Linking Road and Juhu Branches
- 10 October: Indian Merchants' Chamber, Women's Wing Exhibition
- 21 October: Ambuja Foundation, Kalina
- 22 - 23 October: Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), Linking Road and Warden Road Branches
- 12 November: Charity Mela organized by the American Women's Club at J W Marriott, Juhu
- 14 November: Sophia Polytechnic
- 21 & 26 November: Celebrate Bandra Festival
- 4 - 5 December: American School of Bombay

6 December: Indus International Exhibition, YWCA, Colaba  
12 - 14 December: CIF Ongoing Mela 2003, CCI Lawns  
19 - 20 December: Christmas Bazaar, Bandra Gymkhana  
20 - 21 December: Jamnabai Narsee School

**2004:**

19 - 20 January: World Social Forum 2004, Goregaon  
6 March: Family Fun Day, American School of Bombay

**Wharton - S.P. Jain Initiative**

The Wharton Business School, University of Pennsylvania, USA together with the S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research, Mumbai have undertaken a project to formulate a **business plan** for the sale of Aseema products.

A team of ten students from Wharton (Team Magnum) and two from S. P. Jain studied the subject and undertook research to help us develop and market our products in a systematic and professional manner. A trial order to a retail store in Philadelphia was executed by us and met with some success. We also obtained an order for bookmarks from Knowledge@Wharton, the web-based research and business analysis journal of the Wharton School which were greatly appreciated.

Two video-conferences were held during the course of the year which were attended by the Wharton and S. P. Jain teams, the Aseema product team as well as the Aseema children who were fascinated at being able to see and talk to people as far away as the U.S.A.!

The study continues, and new teams (at both universities) are now taking the project forward.

**Film on Child Rights**

Aseema has produced its first film entitled, "Raju and I" which is a 30 minute animated film on child rights, focusing on the right of every child to education. The film was shown at the opening of the Indo-British Digital Film Festival organized by the British Council in Delhi and Mumbai. In December 2003, it won the Grand Jury Prize in the animation category at the New York International Independent Film and Video Festival, and in February 2004, the prize for the best animated film at the International Film Festival, Mumbai. In March 2004, it won the prize for the best short animated film at FICCI-BAF 2004.

We have screened the film at several schools in Mumbai but would like it to reach out to many more. We hope that on seeing the film, children in schools will be inspired to spread the important message that every child has the right to education.

### **Awards**

In October 2003 our Chairperson was awarded the Rotary Vocational Award by the Rotary Club of Bombay West.

In December 2003 the Head of Aseema's Montessori Centre was awarded the Young Achiever Award in the category of Social Work by the Indo-American Society.

### **Conclusion**

An educated citizen is any day a great asset to society, and education is the key to the removal of all major problems e.g. communalism, casteism, population control. Since our great country with centuries of imperishable heritage and culture, is today beset with all of the above problems, the only solution for India is education, education and education.

As Maria Montessori has said, "Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war".

Aseema would not be able to achieve its little bit without the heart-warming generosity of all donors, who have stood by Aseema. To all of them our sincere thanks.

We would be remiss if we did not convey our heartfelt gratitude to all our teachers, staff and volunteers who have worked so willingly and tirelessly, helping Aseema to run smoothly over the years. Much has been done, more is yet to be!

## Thank You!

- \* ACE Productions Pvt. Ltd.
- \* American School of Bombay
- \* Astha Power Corporation Private Limited
- \* Bai Javerbai M. Karsondas Charitable Trust
- \* Bombay Municipal Corporation
- \* C. M. Charitable Trust
- \* Chetna Foundation
- \* Colgate-Palmolive (India)
- \* Comet Media Foundation
- \* Concern India Foundation
- \* Daiya Foundation
- \* Dharmendra Mulji Daiya Foundation
- \* DSP Merrill Lynch Ltd.
- \* Each One Teach One Charitable Foundation
- \* FedEx Corporation
- \* Freny S. Mistry Charitable Trust
- \* Godrej Industries
- \* Indian Institute of Interior Designers
- \* Inner Wheel Club of Bombay West
- \* Intertoll ICS India Pvt. Ltd.
- \* J. J. Hospital & Nursing Association
- \* J. Simon Kirby Foreign Services Trust
- \* Just Trust
- \* Ladies Wing of the Indian Merchants' Chamber
- \* Lemon Grass
- \* Lions Club of Bombay (Willingdon Crescent)
- \* Lions Club of Bombay J. J. Crescent
- \* Lions Club of Mumbai Carter
- \* Lodge Islam No. 27
- \* Lotus Eye Hospital
- \* Lotus Trust
- \* Muskaan
- \* Nembutsu Centre
- \* P. N. Writer & Co. Ltd.
- \* Peridot Nursery
- \* Ratna Nidhi Charitable Trust

- \* Reliance Industries Ltd.
- \* Rose Beauty Parlour
- \* S. P. Jain Institute of Management & Research
- \* Shashikant Dalal Charitable Trust
- \* SHCIL Foundation
- \* Shopper's Stop Limited
- \* Shree Mahalaxmi Temple Charities
- \* Sir Ratan Tata Trust
- \* St. Joseph's Convent
- \* St. Peter's Youth for Youth
- \* St. Stanislaus High School
- \* The Bai Alamai & Seth Ardeshir Talati & Seth Sarosh B. Mody Charity Trust
- \* The British Council, Mumbai
- \* The Ekta Foundation
- \* The Fourth Dimension Studio
- \* J. B. Petit School
- \* The Mahalakshmi Glass Works Pvt. Ltd.
- \* The Ugar Sugar Works Ltd.
- \* The Vidya Trust
- \* Wharton Business School
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