



Kindness • Health • Education • Laughter

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## KHEL ANNUAL REPORT 2012



On the surface, India has changed dramatically since Dr. Usharbudh and Mrs. Lalita Arya began helping the people of Shiv Puri, Bhagat Singh and Vani Vihar colonies more than 26 years ago. In Dehradun where KHEL provides aid and education, there are 10 million people. 22% of India's population still lives below the poverty line of US\$1.25 per day. In the past two years we have seen that the new Indian middle class has the time, energy, inclination and monetary freedom to do more for their less fortunate compatriots. There are more government regulations regarding education for the underprivileged and the poor; perhaps in the past programs were available but now they are being enforced, giving a wider range of children access to decent education. There are still many impoverished children and families in the Dehradun area, and the services KHEL provides are still acutely necessary. The communities we serve with education were originally comprised of an immigrant population from within the Indian subcontinent, people who were displaced from their traditional homes and means of support due to economic, social or environmental pressures and came to the slums around the city seeking work. The huge population in these slums made work very difficult to find. Poor environmental conditions contributed to chronic illness, poverty and violence. These colonies have roughly 60,000 people from many religions (including, but not limited to, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian) and ethnic groups (from virtually all over the Indian subcontinent) and over 20 languages are spoken. This gives KHEL a unique opportunity: in addition to basic needs, health, education and developmental aid, we work towards social integration that is difficult to find in most of India.

### KINDNESS



**Government Regulations:** There have been changes to government regulations regarding education. Scholarships are provided to many groups of children, including minorities, tribals and certain disadvantaged castes. In 2010, the Indian government decided that every child up to the age 14 has the Right to Education (RTE). All schools must reserve 25% of their seats for free admission for kids whose parents make less than rs35,000/year (about US\$780). RTE will help to distribute the neediest students throughout the school system, which relieves some of the pressure on schools like LDA. Another program implemented by the Indian government offers scholarships to children of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC/ST). This includes many different groups of students, including religious minorities and Hindu lower castes. It's KHEL's responsibility to collect funds from the relevant government office and distribute them as dictated by the Department of Social Welfare guidelines, to which KHEL must present a full accounting. This often takes over a year, with Beni, our General Manager, spending much time and effort to collect the funds.



Sometimes, the funds take so long to be disbursed to KHEL that the children have graduated from LDA! In these cases, Beni must then return the money to the government office that issued it. These funds are not used by KHEL. For 2009-10, we received rs1,29,000 (rs1 lakh 29,000, or US\$2,800), and had to return to the government rs7,200 (US\$160) because some students had left LDA. We haven't been able to collect any funds for 2011 or 2012 yet.

**Future Regulations:** *Permanent Recognition:* Two years ago, Beni secured temporary recognition for LDA. This is an important status as it allows us to give diplomas to our graduating 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The temporary status is expiring and we have begun the lengthy process of obtaining permanent recognition. We estimate that this will cost us about US\$500 and, based on how long it took to gain the temporary status, it could take two years. *80G:* This status allows Indian donors to receive a tax deduction for making a donation to KHEL. Our 80G status is up for renewal and we estimate this will cost about US\$600. *Charitable Society status:* Every year, KHEL must renew its charitable status, which costs about US\$200.

**Government Elections:** There were two elections during which the local government used the LDA grounds for a couple of days. They sleep on the property for security reasons. KHEL gives them a couple of rooms to use and provides some refreshments. Election duty usually falls to teachers, government officials, police and security forces.

**Sanitary Facilities:** The bathrooms at LDA had water seepage and it was dangerous for the little kids who kept slipping on the floor. New floors, toilets, wash basins and pipelines were installed and the outside of the building was painted. Secure sanitary facilities are critical for keeping young women in school – in an unsafe area girls are subject to assault and in many parts of the world where there are no bathrooms in the schools, young women can't take care of their personal hygiene and must drop out of school.

**Toronto, Canada:** KHEL hosted a dinner meeting at the gracious home of Mrs. Sharada Bhajan. Among those attending was Dr. Advaita Manohar, hardworking fund raiser for KHEL in Canada. Mrs. Arya, KHEL's Founder, gave an update of activities to all the attendees. Mrs. Arya, fondly known as Ammaji, also spoke at the Toronto Vedic Center on the topic of 'sewa', service to others. After her talk, the youth of the community debated on several topics related to Hinduism, and Ammaji had the opportunity to meet some old friends.

**Texas, USA:** Judy Ann Ehrlich, a teacher at the Blake School in MN, takes a group of student volunteers to OpCamp in Texas every year. OpCamp gives underprivileged kids a chance to enjoy summer camp. She said, "This was, by far, the best OpCamp ever. None of the directors or staff has seen a camp run like this before. Groups meshed within minutes of meeting. Volunteers didn't worry who they were with or what activity was being done....everyone worked together for a single cause...for the kids!" OpCamp is one of the many interfaith projects KHEL supports – this is primarily a Christian camp, but Judy Ann and her volunteers represent multiple faiths.

**Multiple US Locations:** In 2012 Headwaters/Delta Interfaith (HDI), a project of KHEL, moved forward with significant projects and partnerships, including overseeing the Interfaith Spiritual Space at the New Orleans Healing Center, helping to organise the First Annual New Orleans Sacred Music Festival, supporting Interfaith Dialogue between West African and Hindu Spiritual Leaders and partnering with

Hindu American Seva Charities and the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to bring young people from diverse faiths into cooperative social service projects. In addition, we continued to facilitate community outreach and engagement via Social Media management and mentorship, in order to bring service-oriented projects into the consciousness of the general public.

## HEALTH



**Adulterated Milk:** The Dairy Development Board, a cooperative society of the government (DDB), visited LDA. They talked about how to detect adulterated milk. This is a topic close to our hearts, since KHEL originally gave fresh milk daily to poor children; one reason we stopped giving milk over a decade ago was the increasing difficulty we had finding unadulterated milk. It's great that the government is educating the public since adulterated milk can make children very sick.

**Health Camps:** LDA is the only public building in the Shiv Puri area with enough space to accommodate a large group of people, so every month the Health Department of the local government hosts a medical camp on our grounds. Medicines, vaccinations and health care education were shared by the nurses with the women and children of the area. Helpage India, a non-profit, comes to LDA every week and gives medical aid to anyone who needs it. Although they charge a small fee of rs10, they give free medicine.

**'Shashi' Update:** Randall K., a good friend of KHEL, spearheaded a substantial fundraising effort a few years ago for Shashi's heart surgery. Shashi's health has dramatically improved and he was able to travel by car with Beni to meet Randall. Shashi will most likely always have health problems; thanks to the generosity of donors, we have money set aside for him so we can help him every month with medicines, nutrition and travel expenses. He can't ride a bike so we provide funds for him to take an open-air taxi to high school. He must visit the Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust (HIHT) every month for blood tests, and every few months he must go to see his doctors in Delhi. We continue to monitor Shashi closely.

**Leprosy Colonies:** India continues to record the highest number of new leprosy cases in the world. The most recent Indian statistics from 2008 say there were 2.5 lakh (250,000) new leprosy cases worldwide and India accounted for 137,000 of those (*Times of India*, Feb. 9, 2010). It falls on the shoulders of small community service organisations like KHEL to work with the leprosy colonies, educating them on how leprosy is spread. There are more than 100 leprosy patients living at the three leprosy colonies that KHEL supports. In addition to dry food rations and medical aid, KHEL helps with medical costs and education of their children, who do not live with their parents for health reasons. We also support them with infrastructure projects like paving, sanitation, security and permanent housing. Because the families must live apart, KHEL assists with the emotional needs of the residents by providing funds, sweets and fruits for festivals and holidays and by socialising with the residents. In a society where living in an extended family is the norm, being ostracised by society and also separated from their children is a heartbreaking situation for the leprosy colony residents.

**Medical Fund:** The Medical Fund was implemented by the LDA faculty and staff a few years ago, who continue to manage it on their own. Each staff member deposits a small amount every month. Several staff members have used the funds. KHEL is not involved in this fund. We're happy to see the staff and faculty working together without our assistance. Since the purpose of this fund is to help the staff become self sufficient we are seeing a positive result in that staff members do not need to ask KHEL for as much aid for health related reasons. KHEL still provides emergency medical aid when needed.

**Other Medical Aid:** Raghubir, a long time KHEL employee, was suffering from stomach pains. He was diagnosed with an infection, which cleared up with a course of antibiotics. Before he was able to take the medications, his health became worse and he was admitted to the hospital for 5 days. His medical fund savings weren't sufficient so KHEL provided additional financial aid.

Mrs. K., the mother of three LDA students, lost her husband to AIDS three years ago. She was diagnosed with AIDS and is receiving treatment. Although we continue to help her three children with their education, KHEL has no funds to be of further assistance to her and she is completely dependent on her family – her parents are leprosy patients who live at Indresh Colony and can barely support themselves.

Mr. S., a very active member of Indresh Colony, died of heart failure. This is a big loss for Indresh since Mr. S. was not as handicapped as many of the residents and they now have no one who can run errands and do other work outside of the Colony.

KHEL continues to provide medical aid to several ex-LDA students for a variety of ongoing illnesses. Without our aid, these young men and women can't survive

## EDUCATION



**LDA Students:** Several years ago, our Parent Association requested that we start a middle school. They wanted their daughters to stay in school longer but didn't want to send them out of the community. We have graduated two classes of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, all of who went on to high school. Many of the kids in our middle school are older than average. This has led to adjustments to teaching styles in the classroom on the part of the teachers, as they deal with young men and women instead of just children. Currently, we have 298 students in K-8<sup>th</sup> grade. LDA follows a government required curriculum and Government Board exams are taken every March. About 70,000 students in Uttarakhand take this exam, with an average 80% passing rate. All of our 8<sup>th</sup> graders have passed! After the exam period, teachers meet with parents. This is a good time for KHEL to check in with the kids who are getting additional financial support, to see how they're doing and to find out if our support is adequate.

**Other Educational Aid:** KHEL subsidises the education of approximately 150 students after they leave LDA. Besides helping kids with high school, we offer support to two nurses in training, one pharmacist, one post graduate student doing her Masters in Hindi Literature and another young woman pursuing a Master's in Commerce. One nurse graduated from her program and found a job in a government hospital.

**Teachers:** LDA hired a new teacher, Mrs. Shail Mehrotra. Shail has a Masters in Commerce, a diploma in computer studies and is an experienced maths teacher. She will be teaching English, Maths and Computer Science, along with Mukesh and Kusum, two of LDA's teachers. We welcome Shail to LDA!

**Volunteers:** LDA is unique in that our students are exposed to international visitors and volunteers through whose exchange the kids widen their understanding of the world. Volunteers share with us their varied experiences with the KHEL community; this is much appreciated and gives us an opportunity to strengthen KHEL's relationship with those we serve by allowing us to address issues from multiple perspectives, and offer an array of solutions to challenges. Marielle and Jacqui, two young US women in their 'gap' year between high school and college, spent two months volunteering at LDA. Marielle taught Tae Kwan Do and Jacqui taught French Dancing. The children of LDA keep asking for them, wondering when the two 'didis' – big sisters – are coming back to play with them some more. Marielle's mother also visited for a few days. Heather, a US college student, is researching leprosy. She was accompanied by her parents, Tom and Gale, and her younger brother, Brandon, who is 16. The LDA kids were fascinated by Brandon, they'd never met an American boy of his age. He was happy to show them some dance moves and in return, they showed him some Bollywood moves!

**Donor Gifts:** Thanks to a generous donation of computers from a KHEL friend in Delhi, our dedicated teachers, Mukesh, Kusum and Shail, are teaching our kids the basics of computers! This is an important part of their education and will help them in the future to secure jobs and be more aware of the world around them. Due to difficulty with state border customs, it took Beni several trips to the state border to get the computers released. They hadn't been stored well by customs and there was a few hundred US\$ of damage that had to be repaired before we could use them. A donor wanted to provide socks and shoes to all the LDA students. We managed sizing, purchasing and distribution of this project. This may seem like a small donation, but it can make all the difference to a child who is too embarrassed to come to school with cheap, plastic slippers on her feet.

**Teachers' Trip to Jaipur:** Many cultural sites are too expensive for most Indians to visit. Because of this, KHEL sponsors and organises trips for our teachers. As mentors and guides for young minds, it's important that our teachers encounter wider views of the world; these journeys bring them into contact with the different cultures and languages that make up our diverse nation. This year, our teachers visited the state of Rajasthan. Jaipur, the capital city, has many museums, monuments, palaces and holy places. In Ajmer, the President of Pakistan was visiting the same day as the teachers! One teacher said she was proud to be part of an organisation that cares for and loves its members like a family.

**Teachers' Training:** Raphael, a teacher training facility near LDA, has a B. Ed training program. Their trainee teachers come to our school for practical teacher training. Under the supervision of our teachers, they teach our kids and are observed during the training period. LDA's teachers give their comments to Raphael.

## LAUGHTER



**Teachers:** Jaishree, an LDA teacher, got married. The wedding was a typical Indian affair, with much fanfare, dance and delicious food. We're sad to see Jaishree leaving LDA, as her husband works in Delhi. Congratulations to the new couple!

**Former Students:** Ammaji met with Neena, a former LDA student. She's completed her Master's in Commerce. It's gratifying to see what a confident young woman she's become. Neena and her two sisters were very good students at LDA. As a high school student, Neena organised programs with other LDA graduates. She'll soon be married and will move away from Dehradun. We wish her all the best.

**Holidays:** School celebrations, while they may seem like just a lot of fun to the kids, serve the purpose of bringing together members of a diverse community. During the Annual Prize Giving, the kids gave performances from different states and Kamal, a 16 year old hopeful for one of the dance competitions on Indian TV, performed a Sufi dance. Marielle and Jacqui's students demonstrated the skills they'd learned and some of the older students performed an outstanding skit on child labour. Our graduating 8<sup>th</sup> graders gave LDA potted plants as a leaving gift. During the celebration in honour of India's Independence Day Mrs. Shanta Sawh, Ammaji's sister, sang a song. Mrs. Kamli Bhatt, city counselor, Heather and Gale, and many members of the community all joined together to commemorate this important event. On Teachers' Day, the trainee teachers from Raphael wanted to participate in our celebrations. The trainees brought gifts for our teachers and our older students organised treats, entertainment and gifts for their teachers. Mr. Umesh Sharma from the State Assembly was present, among others. To celebrate the special relationship between brothers and sisters, the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> class students designed and created 'rakhis', a traditional bracelet given by girls to their brothers. Other events such as Guru Nanak's birthday and Eid were also celebrated. On Diwali, the kids made wonderful 'rangoli' designs, which are traditional during this holiday. By hosting events at LDA that include multiple constituents, we build trust in the community, not just between KHEL and the community, but among the various groups as well. This has led to peaceful resolution of volatile issues and has kept the colonies a safe environment for our kids even during terrible violence in other parts of India and in Dehradun.

**Sports:** Thank you to Heather Pearson and her family for the donation of volleyball poles, balls and other sports items! Mukesh, one of our teachers, organised a volleyball match between LDA kids and kids from Shiv Puri Colony, many of who graduated from LDA. Thanks to Kamli for providing snacks and prizes to all the competitors! With the new equipment, Mukesh plans to continue training the kids in volleyball. Like celebrations at LDA, sports competitions bring the community together.

**SRSB:** The kids had several opportunities to visit Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama, Swami Veda's ashram in Rishikesh. The International Children's Retreat gave some of the older kids a chance to interact with children from different countries. Many of the LDA kids are from underprivileged or leprosy related families; for them, being with children who don't know this cultural context meant that for perhaps the first time in their lives, they were treated as equals by kids not from their own community. There is no way for us to determine what kind of impact this experience will have on these kids, but we know it will bring them

hope for their future. Some of the kids visited SRSG more recently, as well. They performed folk dances for our Thai friends, visited with Swami Veda and took a field trip to Lakshman Jhula, the swinging bridge that connects the two sides of the Ganges.

**Community Activities:** An Art exhibition by Mukesh, LDA's Art teacher, was held in School. Mukesh also trains the children in music, dancing and stage presence. This kind of event helps promote KHEL by attracting local government officials and other prominent members of the Dehradun community.

### THANKS



So many people make KHEL's work possible; LDA's faculty works with compassion and commitment, KHEL's staff keeps everything running smoothly and even the kids deserve a thank you for the effort they make to stay in school. Volunteers bring their many talents to the students, exposing them to the wider world. The extended Arya/Persaud/Haas/Ilangovan family volunteers their time and expertise to keep KHEL in business, taking on projects from every day administration and tech support to fund raising. With three generations involved in decision making we have a range of ideas and cultural experiences to draw on, making KHEL a dynamic and ever evolving organisation. Our donors have supported us for many years, keeping the kids in school, raising funds for medical needs and providing necessary aid to keep our kids in school. A special thank you to Aaron, Saraswati, their little son, Soma, and Saraswati's mom for hosting a sale of KHEL Artisan Project textiles at the Meditation Center. Without you all, KHEL wouldn't be able to provide education and other services to the kids and their families.



*Eyeful of Sky* is Ammaji's new book of poems available on Kindle, Amazon and in bookstores. These poems were written over a period of about fifty years and include some of her spiritual experiences and reflections on her work for KHEL. Proceeds benefit KHEL. Swami Veda says, "There is a place in us where the Transcendent and the Divine Imminent meet. They merge there seamlessly. It is in that seamless seam that a would-be saint's poetry bubbles up. She, poet of *Eyeful of Sky*, Lalita Arya, has been blessed by a Master Saint whose grace bubbles up in her symphony of syllables and spills over to us. May the reader be transported to that seamless seam of his/her own mind and consciousness and the grace flow up from his/her depths'.

**Happy Holidays!**

In Service,



Kindness • Health • Education • Laughter

Lalita Arya, Founder  
Stomya Arya Persaud, Executive Director  
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