



Kindness • Health • Education • Laughter

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## KHEL ANNUAL REPORT 2011

### KINDNESS



**Junior High School Recognition:** KHEL's greatest accomplishment in 2011 was obtaining official status as a recognised junior high school from the Indian government. Beni, KHEL's dedicated General Manager, along with members of the faculty and staff, have worked hard for nearly two years to secure this status. Without it, KHEL would be unable to provide certifications of graduation to our newly minted 9<sup>th</sup> class students. The educational offices aren't located in Dehradun; Beni traveled into the mountains several times to meet with government officials. Many thanks to Kamli Bhatt, a City Counselor, and Sri Ganesh Joshi who both assisted KHEL in achieving this status!

**Finances:** This recognition is essential for Lakshmi Devi Academy (LDA), KHEL's school in Shiv Puri Colony. The downside is the administrative costs to acquiring and maintaining this status. 2011 was challenging and anxious as we tried to raise funds to continue our services to the communities we help. We have been running KHEL for the past 26 years purely on donations, and as the economies around the world continued to be stressed, we saw a significant drop in donations. We had to increase our fees 35-50% in order to continue providing the level of education LDA is known for. We understand that this can be a hardship for many parents so we endeavour to work with individual families who request more aid or lower fees. After a thorough review of each situation, usually fees are reduced according to what a family can reasonably afford. In some cases, KHEL provides additional funds to a family so that a child in a particularly distressing situation won't have to leave school. Our dedicated staff and faculty are still chronically under paid, and yet they remain, doing such great work for the kids at LDA. During the past year, KHEL had to reduce the allowances being provided to the faculty and staff. Fortunately, by the end of the year, we were able to bring these back to their previous levels and added a small amount more. This is no substitute for much deserved pay increases, which KHEL simply can't afford.

**Interschool Activities:** Thirty two LDA children attended the Inter-School Art & Dance competition. Shilpa, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader, competed against 300 other students in the art competition and was awarded 2<sup>nd</sup> place! We compliment both Shilpa and Mukesh, our accomplished Art teacher.

**Art Exhibition:** An Art exhibition by Mukesh, LDA's Art teacher, was held in School. Mrs. Arya, our Founder/Director, Mr. Ahluwalia, Board Member, and Mrs. Stomya Persaud, KHEL's International

Director, were present. Mukesh is a very talented artist and also trains the children in music, dancing and stage presence.

### **International News:**

**Toronto, Canada:** Following a visit by Ammaji (Mrs. L. Arya) and Stomya to Toronto with friends and donors of KHEL in July, a barbeque was arranged at the home of Anne Raghurai with the help of Dr. Advaita Manohar to raise awareness for KHEL. Sharada Bhajan explained the work of KHEL Charities in education and social upliftment in Dehradun, India. Donations were raised, greatly helping us to continue the much needed programs in India.

**Minnesota, USA:** The Blake School's Justice League hosted a program in conjunction with the anti-bullying initiative Stand Up, Speak Out! Dharani Persaud, a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation KHEL volunteer, is quoted in an interview by Minnesota Public Radio (MPR): 'You have to assert yourself in a way that is not harmful to anyone... Addressing [a bully] with an aggressive attitude is not the best way...because they'll just be more aggressive. Maybe they just need someone to talk to. They're not always the bad guy.' We hope that similar efforts are promoted in India, where eve teasing and ragging have cost many lives. KHEL supports nonviolence as a means to building and sustaining communities – how can children become healthy, educated adults in an environment of aggression and fear?

**Texas, USA:** Op Camp 2011: KHEL provided Opportunity Camp with a \$400 donation, allowing two children from an impoverished Texas community to attend this wonderful and uplifting summer camp. Judy Ann E., the MN organiser for this trip, said, 'It was fabulous! The \$400 donation that KHEL provided allowed two children participate in camp! Thank you so much for your financial support.'

**Headwaters/Delta Interfaith** (a KHEL-supported project), has been working on revitalization and dialogue projects in New Orleans since 2008. In 2011, HDI opened a non-denominational Spiritual Space in the New Orleans Healing Center. The Healing Center's mission is to "provide a holistic, safe, sustainable center that heals, fulfills and empowers the individual and the community by providing services and programs promoting physical, nutritional, emotional, intellectual, environmental and spiritual well-being." The Spiritual Space is open to any community that needs a place to meet for spiritual, religious, and personal development purposes. The space is being used by religious communities, meditation teachers, art therapy teachers, and other support groups. HDI also organized encounters between leaders and community from different faith, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. As part of this mission, HDI worked with Hindu American Seva Charities (a progressive organization advancing seva (community service), interfaith collaboration, pluralism and social justice), to organize their first annual conference, held in Washington DC at the White House and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs.

### **HEALTH**



**Health Camps:** In the area around LDA, there is nowhere else where a large group can comfortably gather, making the grounds at the School ideal for health camps. A Health Camp was held at LDA by the Dalanwala Health Post. School was closed for the day, while all children were examined and babies and

young children from the villages nearby were given vaccinations for polio. Health camps also cover information for mothers and young women, checks for TB, leprosy and other illnesses. Another NGO arranged a medical camp in our school. Although they charge a small amount for their service, rs.10, they also include a week's worth of medication, making this a great service for our students, staff and community. KHEL is pleased to be a contributing force for the promotion of good health and education in Shiv Puri Colony.

**Successful Surgery:** One of our students, Shashi\*, had a heart operation in Delhi. Many prayers were said for him by the LDA students, faculty and staff, and we don't have enough thanks to the donors who made this possible, specifically, Saumya, Randall, Dr. Shirin and the Patkar family. Shashi still has a long road ahead of him, possibly with a lifetime of health issues, but he came through the surgery successfully and is now on maintenance medications such as blood thinners. Meanwhile, we continue to pay for his monthly medications and transportation to high school, since he isn't allowed to ride a bike or do any activities such as walking long distances. We're concerned about his long term ability to support himself, and are watching him closely to see how we can help him be a successful adult.

**Leprosy Colonies:** The residents of the leprosy colonies continue to receive medical and nutritional rations. They also received gifts of sweets and fruits for festivals. During a visit with the residents of Indresh Colony, Stomy and Ammaji were informed that new bathrooms were needed. KHEL doesn't have the funds for this project at the moment.

## EDUCATION



**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. An Italian couple, Luana and Fabio, spent several weeks teaching our students computer studies, geography and the culture of Italy. They also played games and introduced soccer to the senior students. They had this to say about LDA: 'Beni asked us to help by teaching Hatha Yoga and basic computer skills to the children every day. At the beginning, we were concerned to be teaching children who have a cultural context very different from ours; over time, we realized that this difficulty was only in our minds, and we learned as much from them as they did from us! The relationship with the kids and the teachers was totally deep and loving. LDA's teachers are really dedicated and they pay close attention to the kids. The heart of LDA is the teachers and the managers.'

**Donor Gift:** Sangeeta A. brought some dictionaries for our teachers and junior high students. Thanks to Bhagwat and Anita for introducing LDA to Sangeeta, and many thanks to Sangeeta for the donation.

**Teachers' Training:** LDA's teachers are so well respected in Dehradun that Raphael, a teacher training college, chose LDA to supervise 38 newly trained B.Ed teachers. Our faculty was then asked to report on whether these new teachers were ready for the responsibility of teaching. In addition, LDA trained 4 interns for the month of February, making sure they understood how to apply what they'd learned.

**Essay Competition:** LDA organised an English Writing competition, just to keep the kids on their toes! Congratulations to the winners, Farha, Mansi, and Rekha.

**Board Exams:** Government Board exams are taken every March. Our first batch of 8<sup>th</sup> graders all passed! About 70,000 students in Uttarakhand take this exam, with an 80% passing rate. After the exam period, teachers met with parents to discuss marks and summer holiday homework. 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. A staff meeting was held to discuss the next year's teaching curriculum, and the headmistress and a senior teacher attended a session with a government officer to learn of new school regulations concerning Board exams.

### LAUGHTER



**Graduation:** In March LDA's first batch of 8<sup>th</sup> class students graduated and all the children organised a farewell program for their departing friends. A very lively program entirely chaired by the students was hugely enjoyed by the staff and students. This is our first group of 8<sup>th</sup> class students and we're happy to report that ALL of them have gone on to 9<sup>th</sup> class! Before moving on to high school, our 8<sup>th</sup> graders brought fir trees and planted them in the school grounds. We hope that they will come often to see how well their gifts are growing!!

**Holidays:** KHEL staff, students and guests celebrated many events together; Republic Day, Rakhi, Independence Day, Ramzan, Eid, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, Divali, and Navratri. On Teachers' Day, the students voted for their favourite teachers. Congratulations to Asha Stephens, Mukesh Rawat, and Jayshree Dabral! For Children's Day, the children have a sports competition and enjoy a day off from their studies.

**SRSG:** The year closed with a special program at Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama (SRSG) presented by our students during the International Children's Retreat. In addition to putting on a spectacular performance, many of the older students at LDA were able to take part in several days of the Retreat, interacting with more than 80 young people from all over the world. The teachers and other staff also attended on the day of the performance, as well as on other days, to supervise the kids. Everyone praised their performances; the Garhwali folk dances were well received and voted the best performance of the evening! For many of the students this was their first time at an ashram and they liked the peaceful atmosphere. Many, many thanks to Lela and Nalini, the chief organisers of this Retreat, and all the wonderful supporters at SRSG who made it possible for the LDA kids to take part. The children were given gifts by Swami Veda, the Patron of KHEL, and they showered him with rose petals. It was a great way to end the year!

### THANKS



With the support of many donors and friends, KHEL is just managing to keep ahead of the financial curve! So many people make KHEL's work possible. Donors from Canada, USA, India, Italy, UK, West Indies, Germany and South Asia make our work possible. Our wonderful volunteers like Fabio and Luana offer their time and expertise to LDA's kids and teachers. Many of our volunteers are members of our extended family; we couldn't do this without you guys! KHEL's faculty and staff are the most dedicated group of employees ever. They are chronically underpaid, but we hope they know how much they're appreciated for all their hard work. Thanks, everyone, for helping us to help others - KHEL's successes are always a team effort. Thanks especially to Beni who handles all aspects of KHEL in India in our absence, and to Swami Veda, for his continued support and encouragement.

In Service,

Lalita Arya, KHEL Founder  
Stomya Arya Persaud, KHEL Director  
Beni Bhatt, KHEL General Manager