



Kindness • Health • Education • Laughter

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## KHEL ANNUAL REPORT 2014

‘You don’t have to be privileged to have potential’

*Shivani, KHEL Volunteer*



How many children have amazing potential and no means to develop it because of simple, solvable challenges? In some parts of the world, kids are being bombed or kidnapped because they and their families believe in education. At KHEL the threats are, thankfully, less life threatening. But it’s no less devastating to a child who wants to get an education and can’t because she’s menstruating and has no sanitary napkins, or because he has to get a job at 9 years old because his parents are too sick to work. For some children it’s as simple a problem as they don’t have shoes.

How do we help kids to achieve their potential? Education is the primary means to self improvement and is the most basic service we offer. But, there’s no point providing children an education if they’re too sick or malnourished to focus on their studies so we also organise health camps, vaccinations and other forms of medical and nutritional support for the kids and their families.

Education isn’t just about academics. Through our volunteers and the many visitors to KHEL our kids get the benefit of meeting people from all over the world. In 2014, through the Adolescent Resource Centre, we introduced innovative programs to provide our kids with education for life such as career planning, relationship advice and health and hygiene lessons.

Lakshmi Devi Academy (LDA), KHEL’s school for underserved children in Dehradun, India, is more than just a school. It is a gathering space that fosters relationships among diverse groups in a small and densely populated community. Programs like the Buddy Project help the kids to develop empathy for each other from a young age. They learn that, no matter how poor they are, they have something of value to share with someone else.

A fundamental tenet at KHEL is that we help others to help themselves. The embodiment of this idea is a little boy named Akaash who turned up one day at LDA. His mother had passed away; he was lonely and scared while his father, a day labourer, was at work all day. LDA’s compassionate teachers gave him books and school supplies so he could study even though his academic skills were rudimentary and he was far behind his 4<sup>th</sup> grade classmates. Beni, KHEL’s General Manager, helped resolve the situation and Akaash is now happily studying and doing quite well.

India is prospering at a rapid rate. There is so much wealth, there's a growing middle class and everyone seems to have a cell phone. Even Shiv Puri Colony, where LDA is located, is more prosperous than ever before.

Children like Akaash remind us that not everyone is prospering and we must continue to help those in need to fulfill their potential.

## KINDNESS



*Italian Fundraiser:* In October, our dear friends at the Yoga Institute in Florence, Italy, threw a fundraiser for KHEL. Many thanks to Deborah, Ilaria, Cristina and many others who helped to organise and who attended, contributing their time, effort and generous donations to make this a success.

*Volunteers:* Volunteers are a big part of KHEL. They introduce new ways of thinking to our kids and often share fresh solutions to old challenges with us. We had three pairs of volunteers in 2014 - Shivani and Shruti, Maithili and Abhishek and Shalini and Jared. Shivani is a high school student in NY, USA. Shruti, her cousin, is a journalist in Delhi, India. Maithili is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical student in London, UK, and Abhishek is her younger brother. Shalini and Jared are both college graduates based in the US. The volunteers worked with the kids and the community on several projects, details of which are in the Health and Education sections of this report.



*Partnerships:* We expanded our medical aid program, necessitating collaboration with other NGO's so that we can continue to serve the KHEL community effectively. We partnered with Sarayu Devi Charitable Trust (SDCT) and Sankalp Foundation Welfare Society (SFWS). Each NGO plays to its strengths - SDCT funds projects and SFWS has medical contacts and expertise. KHEL has children in need, space for medical camps, contacts in a community that trust us and organisational capacity. We also partnered with Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC), a project of Dhyana Mandiram Trust (DMT) to provide a comprehensive health and wellness course to our older students. Details are in the Education section of this report.

*Condolences:* Our devoted KHEL Board Member, Mr. Ahluwalia, lost his mother, Mrs. Dayal Kaur Ahluwalia. She was a wonderful example to the girls at Guru Nanak Girls' School, where she was Vice Principal. Mrs. Nachundi Devi of Indresh Leprosy Colony passed away in August. As the wife of Indresh's Manager, Ghanshyam, she played an active role in the Colony. Mr. Buddhi Lal, who was responsible for distributing rations to the residents of Rotary Club Leprosy Colony, passed away. Aaron, a long time KHEL supporter and husband of Saraswati, a former LDA teacher, lost his brother, Tim. Kiriti was a kindergartener at LDA. She was sent to a boarding school for 1<sup>st</sup> grade. While there, she fell and broke her

arm. It wasn't properly treated. By the time she was seen by a qualified doctor she had septicemia and died. Although Kiriti was not an LDA student when she passed away, she was still part of the extended KHEL community and we mourn her loss. To all those in the KHEL community who lost someone close to them, we offer our sincere and heartfelt condolences.

*OpCamp:* KHEL provides a yearly grant to Judy Ann, a teacher at The Blake School in Minneapolis, MN, USA, to take student volunteers to Opportunity Camp in Texas to act as summer counselors to rural underserved children. By giving these young people an opportunity to witness firsthand what real poverty looks like, we hope to engender in them compassion for those less fortunate than themselves, and the capacity to do something about it.



*Improvements at LDA:* We replaced the mains switch and electrical switch boards which hadn't been updated since 1988. We added lights to the bathrooms, the stage and some classrooms. We added lighting outside to act as a deterrent to break ins. The cost was INR39,100 (USD630). Water borne diseases such as Typhoid and Malaria are common in Shiv Puri Colony. To help our kids stay healthy, we updated the drinking water system at LDA. The sinks, overhead water

tank and water purification system were replaced. The drinking water area was repaired and a lockable grill door was installed. The cost was INR50,000 (USD800). The cost of yearly maintenance is INR4,000 (USD65).



*Leprosy Colonies:* KHEL provides emergency medical funds as well as monthly rations and medical aid to three leprosy colonies - Ram Mandir, Indresh and Rotary. We also provide aid to a few leprosy patients who don't live in these colonies. The population of these colonies is aging. Before our aid, they begged every day in the city to support themselves. As they get older this becomes more difficult. Thanks to our aid, they don't have to beg as often.

*Sweaters for LDA Kids:* Mrs. Marwah, President of Sri Kalyan Samiti (a women's welfare society), visited LDA with other women from her society to distribute sweaters to all our school kids.

*An Unusual Donation:* Mary Bowman-Cline, an artist and yoga teacher from Minnesota, USA, donated a model plastic skeleton to LDA.

*Security Issues:* Due to a terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, and continued threats to education across the globe, the local government instituted safety procedures for schools. LDA conforms to many of the new regulations already, and must install certain other measures which we have been asked not to discuss for security reasons.

*RTE:* The Right to Education Act is, in general, a very good idea but, from the point of view of many schools, it has been poorly implemented. Schools in Dehradun have complained about the slow reimbursement of funds while still having to meet payroll and other running expenses. Since LDA is run on donations rather than tuition, we aren't dependent on fees to meet our expenses. All schools, including LDA, are required to reserve 25% of 1<sup>st</sup> grade seats for children Below Poverty Level (BPL), from Scheduled Castes (SC) or Other Backward Castes (OBC). These families must prove their status with a government issued ID. Manju, LDA's Headmistress, and Manohar, LDA's Community Outreach

Coordinator, attend many meetings with the Education Officer during the school year. Occasionally Beni, KHEL's General Manager, accompanies them. It is our responsibility to make sure we have selected the correct students, that they have the correct ID's and that they have a bank account set up to receive funds directly from the government. This entails coordinating with often illiterate parents, helping them to secure the necessary documents and open a bank account. They don't receive any funds until the end of the year when we submit a report to the Education Office detailing the children's attendance, at which point they're given INR2 (USD0.03) per day of attendance. This means that we cover all those costs anyway, since these families are too poor to pay for the basic necessities of an education, and of course, we don't ask them to pay us back. This costs us about INR100 (USD1.67) per child with 31 children qualifying under RTE. This doesn't include the normal expenses for LDA kids that we cover such as books and uniforms. In 2014 after much persistence, we were reimbursed INR9,720 (USD162). We're pleased about this, since it's the first time we've been reimbursed during the same year these children attended LDA. We still haven't received a reimbursement for 2013.

## HEALTH



*Medical Check Up for Mothers and Young Children:* KHEL conducted a medical camp for pregnant women and mothers with young children. Two volunteers, Maithili and Abhishek, assisted. Maithili designed and gave informational sessions on well baby care and pre and post natal care. Thirty-four women attended, which is lower than the usual amount of attendees for our medical camps, due to the monsoons and because this camp targeted a specific group of people. We administered tests for blood pressure, hemoglobin and blood sugar, and took height and weight measurements. The women wanted supplements and medications for simple ailments such as fever, cough, joint pain and general weakness (due to lack of nutrition). We provided well baby care kits for them to take home. The cost was INR20,000 (USD340).



*Public Health Camp:* We provided a camp for KHEL's students, staff, families of staff and anyone in the community who wanted a general health check up. There were over 600 participants. Portions of this camp were designed to determine if our students were healthy enough for vaccinations. KHEL's two interns, Shalini and Jared, took part in nearly every aspect of this camp, first in discussions prior to coming to India, and then by assisting at the camp. Dr. Choudhary and Dr. Joshi prescribed medicines and supplements while Sanjeev, Sanjay and Rakhi (from SWFS) distributed them free of charge. Jared, Shalini, Beni and Bhagwat (KHEL's Assistant Manager) administered tests for blood pressure, hemoglobin, blood sugar and checked height and weight. The cost was INR53,000 (USD885).





*Medical Aid:* KHEL provides aid to individuals on an emergency and case-by-case basis. Rajeshwari, a long time staff member at LDA, needed surgery and several months of paid leave to recover. Manohar's wife also needed surgery. Both women have fully recovered. Savita and Rakesh, two siblings of Rekha who passed away in 2013, are receiving nutritional supplements. During the first vaccination camp one of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls fainted due to low grade malnutrition. We've been giving her Horlicks (Indian malted milk powder fortified with iron) and she's doing much better. A 12<sup>th</sup> class student who is being supported by us had a dangerous throat infection and had to be hospitalized for a week. The cost of medical aid was INR55,000 (USD920).

*Salman:* Salman was a student at LDA and is now in high school. He continues to need monthly medical aid for heart medication and transportation to school. He is also on medications for kidney stones as he is too fragile for surgery. Because he will need financial assistance for the rest of his life, funds originally donated for his heart procedure several years ago is held in trust, with only the interest being disbursed. The cost for this support is INR9,000 (USD150).



*Leprosy Colonies:* KHEL gives aid to three leprosy colonies – Indresh, Ram Mandir and Rotary. Every other month we provide medical aid to supply the dispensary at Ram Mandir, where 34 residents live. At Indresh there are 14 residents and a few children and grand children of the residents. In the past children didn't live at these colonies as long term exposure to Leprosy isn't healthy for them. But, with better health care and housing available, the children can live with their families rather

than sending them to orphanages. We also provide dry rations such as rice and pulses to the three colonies on a monthly basis. On holidays such as Holi and Diwali, we send sweets and gifts to the leprosy colonies so that they, too, have the opportunity to celebrate. The cost for this support is INR6,60,000 (USD11,000).



*Hepatitis B Vaccinations:* It's been 16 years since we last administered non-government sponsored vaccinations at LDA. We've re-started vaccinations for our kids, staff and their families because severe overcrowding in the community around LDA has increased the risk of illnesses. The community is less migrant so the kids are staying in one place long enough to receive the multiple injections needed for full immunity to some illnesses like Hepatitis B, which is endemic to the area. Jared and Shalini participated in this camp as well. Jared administered vaccinations under the supervision of the vaccination nurse, and Shalini helped organise the camp. Shalini and Jared noticed that there was need for better hygiene, organisation and sensitivity to the children's fear of injections. For the second round of HepB vaccinations KHEL purchased a needle breaking unit to make the needles safe to dispose of, and additional trash cans.



We removed the kids from the part of the school where they can see the vaccinations taking place, helping to reduce their fear. The kids, of course, weren't thrilled that they were getting shots again so we tried to make up for it by giving them chocolate bars after they bravely got their injection. On hand to help distribute chocolate was Randall, a dear friend of KHEL's who has supported our work for many years. The two camps cost INR40,000 (USD680).

*Government Health Clinics at LDA:* The government of Uttarakhand arranges health clinics at LDA because the school grounds are the largest open area in the community. There are no fixed dates for these camps. They're arranged through the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Program, a government

undertaking in which a local health worker (who is generally called Asha, regardless of what her name is) is tasked with the health care for a small community. Through ASHA, women and children under the age of 5 have regular, free health checkups. Vaccinations given by the government such as Polio, Tetanus, BCG and Measles are administered during larger health camps which are run by doctors and nurses employed by the government. As always, we welcome the opportunity to share our space for the good of the community, and we provide them with water, tea and snacks.

## EDUCATION



*Academics:* All 19 of our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students passed their exams and have gone on to high school. Congratulations to all of them on a job well done!

*First Aid Classes:* Shivani and Shruti worked with our 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade students on basic first aid. Shivani is a volunteer 'youth aider' with her local ambulance corps in New York. Shruti worked as Shivani's translator. The kids learned the basics of first aid including washing their hands before cleaning a wound, how to wrap a bandage and what to do in case of shock. The kids decorated boxes to use as at home first aid kits. Shivani and Shruti supplied the equipment for them to take home, much to the delight of not only the kids but their parents, who were pleased that their kids were being taught first aid. Last year, the tragedy of the monsoons of 2013 was still fresh in the minds of the children and many of them felt helpless in the face of the devastation. Learning basic first aid was a way to give them a sense of control and self reliance. Shivani and Shruti provided their own funding for this project.

*Health and Wellness Classes:* For the month of September Shalini and Jared conducted health and hygiene classes for LDA's 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Shalini combined her experience of mentoring underserved middle school girls at WYSE in New Orleans with her in depth knowledge of the socio-economic culture of the LDA kids to devise workshops. In Shalini's workshop, the girls learned about their menstrual cycle, HPV, HIV/AIDS, healthy relationships and general hygiene. Jared worked with the boys on drug abuse, respecting women, non-violent behaviour, HIV/AIDS and general hygiene.



*Buddy Project:* While Shalini and Jared were here, one of our 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls attempted suicide using the small razor blade inside a pencil sharpener. She attempted this at LDA and was stopped by her friends. Her wound was not deep and the razor wasn't very sharp so Manju, LDA's Headmistress, cleaned the wound and wrapped it in clean gauze that was left over from the first aid camp. The girl (who will remain anonymous to protect her privacy) received a Tetanus shot. We had to tell her parents. Counselors and psychiatrists are virtually unheard of in this community as mental/emotional instability (regardless of cause) is considered a family matter. In addition, many families are struggling with basic needs such as food so hidden problems are often ignored. We're seeing an increase in frustration levels of the young people in our care, leading the boys to drug abuse (glue and solvent sniffing) and the girls to attempt suicide or running away from home. On the heels of this traumatic event, Shalini again drew on her experience at WYSE and her knowledge of KHEL and its kids to develop a Buddy system between younger and older students with culturally appropriate activities. LDA kids have two standards of conformity – their home

lives and their school lives. They have very little outside of that. A Buddy system gives them someone who isn't related to them to nurture or to look up to, leading to a healthier, more balanced sense of self.

*Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC):* On the heels of the attempted suicide, we took drastic action regarding the mental health and wellbeing of our kids. An initiative of Dhyana Mandiram Trust, Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama, Rishikesh, an Adolescent Resource Centre has been established at LDA. Initially, programming will focus on LDA's 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade students. The ARC program will cover the overall development of adolescents and will focus on health concerns, but not just physical health. The emotional health of a growing young person is equally important. ARC's aims are to convey critical information needed at this time of life, reinforce healthy attitudes and behaviours regarding health, hygiene and interpersonal relationships, address a range of questions from reproductive health to career planning, and enhance the emotional health and internal development of adolescents. An integrated, holistic model of change is being implemented that embraces gender equality and enhances self esteem through self reliance. Thanks to Bhola Shankar Dabral for initiating this very important project at LDA.



*Plastic Bag Clean Up in Shiv Puri Colony:* LDA was chosen by the District Administrator to spearhead a plastic bag cleanup effort in Shiv Puri Colony, where LDA is located. Plastic bags are a huge problem; the infrastructure for their proper disposal is limited. Plastic bags clog and pollute the rivers and animals die from eating them. Mr. Mathur, the government official in charge of this project, brought some snacks for the kids, and then joined them and their teachers for a walk through the community to talk to residents and to help the kids collect as many plastic bags as possible. Mr. Mathur took the bags with him to dispose of correctly. Maybe we can't change the way the adults think, but by educating the children on this and other environmental issues, we can make a difference long term.

## LAUGHTER



*Art Exhibit:* Our Drama and Art Teacher, Mukesh, held an Art exhibition of his works sponsored by the Department of Fine Arts of the School of Talent where he volunteers to teach youth who are interested in pursuing art. The focus of this exhibit was the tragic monsoons of 2013 that devastated the mountain villages.

*LDA Former Students:* Please join us in congratulating Sarita on the occasion of her marriage! She is a Manager at a five star hotel in Varanasi. Sarita's family has always valued education and with KHEL's help they made sure she stayed in school. Sarita has found a balance for herself between the values she was brought up with (by asking her family to meet and approve of the man she wanted to marry) and the values she's come to recognise as important to her – building a life where she decides what she does and who (and when) she marries. Sarita's older sister, Saraswati, is pursuing her PhD in the US so it's no surprise that Sarita, too, is making her own decisions. What a difference an education makes!



**Visitors:** In addition to the 6 volunteers, we had many visitors drop by for an afternoon visit. Our first visitors of 2014 were from Italy. Matteo, the youngest in the group, was only 10 and has been visiting India since he was two years old. Shruti (who was also a volunteer during a different visit) has visited LDA many times. On this visit she asked the kids what their career aspirations were and was pleased to hear them talk about careers in social service. Saraswati, Aaron and their young son Soma visited from Minnesota, USA, to attend Saraswati's sister Sarita's wedding (they've since had another child. Congratulations!). Saraswati took the opportunity to speak to the students at LDA about life in the US and what she's studying for her PhD. Sharon McDonough, Aaron's mother, was also visiting to attend Sarita's wedding and enjoyed her trip to LDA immensely. Randall, our very good friend from California, stopped by to distribute chocolates to the kids. The kids especially enjoyed the Aikido demonstration by Swami Tat Sat and a couple of his students during the Germany group's visit. Our graduating 8<sup>th</sup> graders shared their special day with guests from California. Mehrad, Michele and many others joined the kids for a few hours of entertainment organised by the 7<sup>th</sup> graders in honour of their friends in the outgoing class.



**Teachers:** Mukesh, our Art and Drama Teacher, got married. Beni, Manohar and Bhagwat had an adventure going to the wedding which was in the mountains. The road finally became too rough for their little car so Mukesh arranged for a jeep. At some point even the jeep could go no farther and they had to walk. Mukesh sent his cousins with torches to show them the way. They had a great time!

**Holidays:** For *Vasant Panchmi* (celebration of Spring) Ammaji treated KHEL's staff and the 8<sup>th</sup> graders to a movie in the brand new Silver City Mall. Everyone enjoyed the movie but it was challenging for the teachers to contain the excitement of the students who have very little experience of how to behave in a mall. On *Children's Day* we celebrated with fun, games and sports competitions for all the students. After the competitions, the winners were awarded prizes and everyone had a snack together. *Rakhi* is a traditional holiday for brothers and sisters to acknowledge the deep bond of siblings. Our 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students had a lot of fun making beautiful Rakhis. On *India's Independence Day* local dignitaries join the staff and students at LDA to celebrate with a flag raising, singing the national anthem and enjoying a snack together. For *Teachers' Day* the older children put together a show for their teachers. The Education Department requested that schools show the Prime Minister's address to children. We don't have a TV at LDA, so Beni brought his own TV to school so that the 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> graders could share this experience with all the school going children of India.



**Middle School Picnic:** Playing and having fun is a big part of being an LDA student, so when the middle schoolers asked us to take them to a local water park to celebrate the end of the school year, we said yes. The kids had fun in the water and on the playground but it was a challenge to keep the monkeys away from them, and away from the food. Some of the teachers had to stand guard with long sticks to protect the children. Thanks to all the teachers and staff who went with the kids and kept them safe. The cost was INR14,800 (USD245).





*Teachers Visit Amritsar:* Every year, we send our teachers to a state capital in India; it's a lot of fun for them but it's also educational and they can share their experiences with their students at LDA. This year they visited Amritsar. Beni, KHEL's General Manager, wrote about the visit: 'We visited Amritsar for Baisakhi [founding day of Sikhism] and the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Jallianwala Bagh was once a public park. The only way in or out is a narrow tunnel. On April 13, 1919, on the Sikh holy day of Baisakhi, innocent celebrants were fired upon and murdered by the British. We stayed for the homage program to honour the people who died, and paid our respects. Then we went to the Golden Temple which is a very famous Sikh Gurudwara [place of worship]. Because it was Baisakhi there were thousands of people there. We stood in line for 4 hours but it was worth it. The Gurudwara is in the middle of a manmade lake and is gold plated. We paid our respects and then went to the 'langer' which is a free meal offered every day. After eating we went to our hotel as it had been a long and emotional day for all of us. The next day we went to the Wagah Border which is the only road crossing between India and Pakistan. Every evening, the ceremonial security forces on both sides perform a retreat parade. We also visited the Dudyana and Hanuman Temples. It was a very memorable and meaningful trip for all of us.'

*Shalini and Jared Take the 8<sup>th</sup> Class Students on an Outing, and Shalini Encounters a Cultural Quandary:* Jared and Shalini, our two September interns, spent a fun afternoon with the 8<sup>th</sup> class students at a Buddha Temple complex just outside of Dehradun. After the outing, Shalini recounted an incident: 'I was sitting with a couple of the girls to have lunch. I don't usually eat out when I'm in India because it's easy to get sick but I wanted to be polite so I took some food. After I'd put down my fork and still had chow mein on my plate, I looked over at the girls sitting with me and noticed that they'd put down their forks and stopped eating exactly when I did. These girls are so thin and under fed, I felt terrible that they weren't eating all their food simply because I wasn't eating all of mine. Although it made me a little sick later on that evening, I ate all the rest of my food so that the girls would eat theirs.'



*SRSB:* Some of the kids and teachers went to Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama (SRSB), Swami Veda's ashram in Rishikesh, during the Family Retreat. They performed for the guests and enjoyed a meal. On a separate visit, several LDA students, staff and their kids spent the day at SRSB to attend the Family Retreat. Most memorably they joined other participants on a Ganga walk, discussed environmental issues and made an effort to collect a lot of garbage for proper disposal.

## THANKS



As always, KHEL is a group effort. Many thanks to the friends who keep us running including Margaret, M, Sudhanshu, Lori B, the Chandrans, Sharon F, Enzo, Lisa G, The Himalaya Yoga Institute of Florence, Italy, Brian & Marjorie, the Ilangovans, Kamal, Randall, Saraswati & Aaron, Jay O, Lauren, Lisa S, Robert S, Mary

& Rick T, Paul T, Gala V, Swami Tat Sat and our German friends, Mohini, Mehrad, Mr. Kamat and everyone at EAPL, Prabhjot, Sadhana, Pooja, Sanjeev, SDCT and DMT. Thanks to The Meditation Center in MN for administrative assistance. Thanks to Anirudh for volunteering as Jared's translator and to Shruti for sharing her short videos of the KHEL kids. Thanks to Dr. Choudhary and Dr. Joshi who worked at the medical camps, to Sanjay Maini of SWFS for organising the camps and Sanjeev and Rakhi for keeping everything running smoothly. Thanks to Dr. Harish Nautiyal, nurses Mrs. Rameshwari and Mrs. Negi, Mr. Singh, Jared, Shalini and the staff of LDA for their hard work to make the vaccination clinics a success (and to Shalini for many of the photos in this report). Thanks to all our volunteers for giving of their time. Thanks to those who gave in-kind donations: Mary B, Mrs. Marwah and Mr. Singhal who doesn't charge KHEL for his professional services. Thanks to Bhola for suggesting and implementing the ARC program, and to Sadhana and the DMT Board members who supported this endeavour. Thanks to the Arya/Persaud/Haas/Ilangovan family members who, by default, are all volunteers. To the teachers and staff of KHEL, thanks are inadequate. You're all amazing and we couldn't do this without you!

To our guiding light, Ammaji; you continue to shine brightly, gracing us with your kindness and presence.



To Swami Veda, thank you for your blessings and for imparting to us the Grace of the Guru Spirit.



In Service,

