

Isha Vidhya



2007 Highlights



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Isha Vidhya's 2007-08 academic year began with a flourish this June with the opening of three new schools in Perumapalayam (Erode), Kornady (Nagercoil), and Sirupadu (Tuticorin). We now have a total of 733 students between our four schools.

Scholarships



This year marked the successful launch of the Isha Vidhya Scholarship Program. Isha Vidhya's goal is to provide high quality education at affordable prices for rural families. After opening the schools, however, we found that even minimal fees are often unaffordable. Any school fees strain already limited budgets, forcing families to cut necessary expenditures in areas such as food, medicine and clothing.

Our need-based scholarships were created in response to this situation. Through the support of many generous donors, we were able to provide over 32% of our students with scholarships in this first year of the program! The Scholarship Program will be expanded each year in accordance with the growing number of Isha Vidhya students and schools. For the 2008-2009 academic year, our goal is to be able to provide 800 scholarships.

We request donors to sponsor the full 12 years of a child's education, from Class I to Class XII. Scholarships for the 2008-09 academic year have been set at Rs.7000 / USD 180 / GBP 95. Donors who adopt a child's education receive updates on their student each term, including photos, letters and progress reports. We invite you to tell your friends and family about this opportunity to impact the life of a child in a truly powerful way!

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Celebrations

India's rich and diverse culture hosts a wide spectrum of exciting and colorful festivals. To help our students learn about and appreciate the diversity of religions and traditions within India, many of these festivals were celebrated in unique ways within our Isha Vidhya schools. To read more about how the students celebrated and to view photos of the events, please visit our Celebrations section on pages 7-9.

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Meetings

Parent-teacher meetings are held thrice a year at the conclusion of each academic term, with the goal of involving the parents in the development of the schools and keeping them updated on their child's progress. Open discussions are conducted between the parents and teachers regarding several topics, including curriculum, fees, future plans, etc. Several topics were brought up in this year's first meeting, including the unique curriculum of the Isha Vidhya Methodology. The Isha Vidhya Methodology emphasizes active learning, moving instruction away from reliance solely on blackboards and text books. The subjects specifically designed to incorporate active learning include **Total Physical Response (TPR)**, **Karadi Path**, and **Computer Assisted Learning (CAL)**. These subjects are not found in typical rural schools in Tamil Nadu; so, the parents brought up questions about the processes involved in these subjects and why they are used rather than more conventional methods.



PTA Meetings continued....

Our administrators discussed with parents the advantages of engaging students in active learning and shared more information about the structure of these three learning methods. The TPR method coordinates language learning with movement, leading to significantly higher retention and comprehension levels.

The Isha Vidhya teachers received training in the TPR methodology from Dr. Shelly Thomas of the Mid-East Tennessee University. Karadi Path is a specially designed learning system which weaves music, motion and reading together, helping students to intuitively grasp advanced

Language skills while also having fun. Our CAL classes make use of a variety of interactive computer programs supplied by the Azim Premji Foundation. The programs range from English to Tamil to Math, and engage students in active learning through games, problem solving questions, and stories.



Parents at the Sandegoundenpalayam Parent-Teacher meeting shared positive feedback on the noticeable impact the provision of school lunches has had on the health of their children. Both the lunches and the nutritional health supplements provided by the schools have been instrumental in enhancing the students' abilities to absorb and retain what is learned in class.



A view from outside in



Visiting the school over the past couple weeks has been an extremely rewarding experience! Each morning, enthusiastic, exuberant students pour out of the school buses, clamoring into the brightly decorated classrooms. Stowing their things, they prepare for another day of learning and discovery. As I enter a classroom, the students stand to greet me, "Good morning, Miss!" they chant, darting me shy glances and smiles.

After reciting the multiplication tables with gusto, the students settle down to solve problems in their notebooks. As soon as a student finishes, she races up to the teacher to have her work checked. After scanning over the answers, the teacher draws a star on the student's paper. A huge grin spreads across the girl's face.

As more students eagerly queue up in front of their teacher, I notice how they react when their work is approved: filling with pride, they stand straighter and walk bolder. "Look, I got a tree!" One student shouts out, excitedly pointing to his paper and showing his friend the drawing the teacher made next to his correct answers. How often do I encounter such unrestrained joy, I wonder; and, over something as simple as recognition for completing an assignment! Truly these children are flourishing: it's visible in their faces, the way they move, the way they come to school. What an amazing environment for education and growth.

Diana Price, Education Coordinator, Isha Vidhya



Future Plans

Classrooms and multi-purpose halls:

Each of the Isha Vidhya Schools opens its first year with classes Lower Kindergarten through to Second Standard. An additional grade level is added each subsequent year as the oldest students graduate upwards, until eventually, each school will have classes from Lower Kindergarten through the 12th Standard. Yearly infrastructure expansions will be required to accommodate the additional class levels until the schools are running at full capacity. In addition to expanding the classroom facilities for the 2008 – 2009 academic year, we plan to construct multi-purpose halls in each of the schools, as meals, meetings and school functions are currently being held in the school corridors. Many opportunities exist for individual and company support of our expansion projects!

School Libraries:



A library creates an opportunity for students to expand their horizons and discover new worlds beyond what they experience in life and read in their text books. Through books, students can take their learning into their own hands by exploring their unique areas of interest and passion. Research has shown a strong correlation between student achievement levels and the presence of quality library facilities: Students attending schools with well-stocked libraries achieved high standards regardless of the affluence or education level of their parents and community. Well-equipped libraries are particularly important for schools in underprivileged areas, where children do not have books of their own at home.

Our goal is to equip each of our schools with a minimum of 3000 books. Fundraising efforts are currently underway towards this end, with each book costing approximately Rs. 90, about \$2. For more information, please see page 10.



Future Plans continued....

New Schools

Towards our goal of having 206 schools up and running in the next 7-10 years, plans are underway for opening one new school for the upcoming academic year. The school will be located in the village near to Cuddalore. The School is being opened specifically to assist the victims of the 2004 Tsunami. Located on the Eastern coast of India, this area experienced great devastation of property and livelihood as a result of the Tsunami, and many families continue to struggle with little recourse for future improvement.



Because of the extreme poverty in this area, we would like to be able to support every student through our Scholarship Program. Representing a major life-changing opportunity for these children, providing every student with a scholarship also presents a major fundraising challenge, and we look to you for your support in making this vision a reality!

See page 10 to get involved.

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2007 Celebration Highlights



Each of the schools observed **Independence Day** this past August, hoisting the orange, white and green of India's flag. Erode students gave speeches about freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. They also sang "My Name is Madhavi," a Karadi Rhymes song celebrating India's diverse cultural heritage.

Adi Perukku, a day for giving thanks for water and dams, was also celebrated in the month of August. What better way to celebrate than by building a river and a dam, which is exactly what the Sandegoundenpalayam and Tuticorin schools did. Brimming with anticipation, the students watched as the teachers lifted the dams they had built. The children lined up along the edges of their river as the water rushed through, holding their little hands out to catch the water as it passed. The teachers took this opportunity to explain the value of water and water conservation, as well as the importance of dams in India. A fun, educational, and wet day for all!



Celebrations continued....

Teacher's Day was celebrated September 5th, with all the students giving special greetings to their teachers to express their gratitude. When asked to share some of their thoughts on the school, the following comments were given: "My favorite subject is math because I like the teacher!" S.Sellakumar, class 3. "The school is very nice and beautiful! The teachers teach us well." K.Sathyannarayaran, class 3.

Navratri Kolu, "Nine Sacred Nights", occurred over October 12th to 21st. One of India's most celebrated festivals, Navratri Kolu commemorates the victory of good over evil. The traditional practice of displaying wooden dolls of Gods and Goddesses was carried forth in the schools, with each child bringing dolls to display for nine days. On the final day of the festival,



Called Saraswati Puja, special offerings and pujas were made to the Goddess Saraswati, who is the divine source of wisdom and enlightenment, and the special deity of education. The ninth day is also known as Vijayadasami, meaning victory. Tradition holds that if you enroll your child in school on this day, she will grow up to be very successful! In accordance with this age-old belief, our schools made special openings for admissions during this day.



Celebrations continued...



The bird takes shelter in this coconut tree. As the rains come down harder and harder, a flood comes and washes all the trees away except the one coconut tree sheltering the bird.

Other performances included a folk dance by students wearing traditional saris, a customary Karnatika song put on by class two students, and an Indian fable acted out by class one students. The 1st and 2nd standard children held a debate over why we have celebrations, with one side suggesting celebrations are for wasting money and showing off, while the other side held that celebrations create opportunities for friends and family to come together and share their love.

Diwali, known as the "Festival of Lights," is one of India's most popular holidays and was held this year on November 9th. The Nagercoil School celebrated in a big way with firecrackers, dances, dramas and debates. In addition to the students, staff and teachers, volunteers from around the community were invited to attend the school's celebration. The volunteers assisted in distributing sweets to the children and in setting off the fire crackers.

After the fire cracker display, students from UKG & LKG performed an interpretive dance called "Helping Mind," in which a little bird seeks shelter from the trees against a coming storm. All the trees refuse to help the bird except for one small coconut tree.



