

Isha Vidhya



News Letter
Issue 2

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An amazing second year at Isha Vidhya has just wrapped up, and this newsletter offers a recap of some of the highlights. To begin, we would like to thank the students, teachers, principals, volunteers and donors for making the year happen in such a beautiful way. Just two short years ago, Isha Vidhya began its first model school in Sandegounden Palayam with 263 students. The following year, three additional Isha Vidhya schools opened in the villages of Perumapalayam (Erode), Kornady (Nagercoil), and Sirupadu (Tuticorin), with a total of 733 children enrolled between the four schools.

Scholarships




The scholarship program is making children's dreams come true!

It has been a truly successful program and we hope to continue its growth by leaps and bounds over the next few years. With 32% of our children under scholarship last academic year, we plan to increase the number of scholarships to over 50% for the academic year beginning 2nd June, 2008.

As the Scholarship Coordinator, this journey has been both a heart rendering and an eye opening experience while I learn about rural India's culture, people and way of life. But this offering is much more than just these words; it is a process of inclusion and motherly responsibility that has given me joy and pleasure in enormous proportions.

The children that we are helping: to see them up close and to have a personal relationship with them, makes me realize this is not some small thing we are doing. Through the children's sharings, I have learned how different their other educational options are compared with *Isha Vidhya*. At the beginning of the school year, we asked the children what they liked best about their new school. Nearly all of them told us, "We like our teachers, they don't beat us. Our teachers speak to us kindly; if we tell one wrong answer, they do not scold us."

It breaks my heart every time I hear this because I can hardly stand the idea of someone mistreating these sweet bright-eyed beings. They say corporal punishment has been outlawed in India. Well, this may be true in urban schools, but it does not hold up in the rural areas, not at all. Apart from this, the children share with me that their other subjects are being taught to them in new and exciting ways - ways that make their learning easy and fun. Singing *Karadi* rhymes and dancing to the music, what child wouldn't enjoy learning a new language in this way. When I walk through the halls of the school, I can hear the enthusiasm of the rhymes being sung and see the smiling faces through the windows as they dance. The children also love their garden period, where each student gets to plant and take care of the garden in their school. "I planted a tree all by myself and I get to water it every day," one student told me.



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Scholarships continued...

There isn't a day that goes by that my eyes do not swell with tears of joy, whether I'm reading a parents' sharing, writing an article or doing office work.

These children are going to be remarkable, educated adults in a few years, and I will have had the honor of watching them blossom into their higher possibilities. I hope everyone can experience this with me, either by adopting some of our children's educations, donating land for a school or coming to volunteer, because this *will* change your life!

Together Let's Make It Happen!

Arielle Star, Isha Vidhya Scholarship Coordinator

Sports Day at Isha Vidhya!!!

Ready, set, go! The beginning of spring brought with it the annual **Sports Day** celebrations at the **Isha Vidhya schools**. Sports Day, held in matriculation schools throughout India, presents an opportunity for students to demonstrate their prowess outside of the classroom in a variety of athletic events. The Isha Vidhya schools combined Sports Day this year with the **Annual Day** celebrations, in which the rich and diverse Indian culture is displayed through songs, dances and theatre performances. Leading the way, the Sandegounden Palayam School (Coimbatore) held their Sports Day and Annual Day over February 14th and 15th. Faces shining, the students began the day marching across the field in their new black and orange Sports Day uniforms. Mrs. Maheshwari, chief guest of honor and principal of Isha Home School, graciously lit the Sport's Day torch. With the torch held by a third grade student, the students marched in unison around the track to the Olympic bowl, where they lit the Olympic Flame.



The first event of the day was Mass Drills, performed by the students from 2nd and 3rd standards. Stepping with precision, the students twirled ribbon laden batons while moving from one formation to another. Following Mass Drills, the students dazzled the audience with a series of intricate human pyramids.

The running races were not to be missed! Every class competed in preliminary heats and the top performers from each group moved onto the finals. Even the little kindergarten students, ages 3 and 4, took part - racing in the *Frog Jump*, with each student hopping like a frog to the finish line! After the preliminary rounds, the children took a break to catch their breath, and the parents stepped up to the starting line to compete in a running race.



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Sports Day continued...

Jumping and cheering, the children watched with wide eyes as their moms and dads raced around the track at full speed!

New on the schedule this year was the *Balloon Bursting* contest for the kindergarten and 1st standard students. Balloons were tied to the children's hips; while staying within a circle painted on the ground, the children scrambled to burst their opponent's balloons with their hands while protecting their own balloon. This event proved to be hilarious for the audience!

Later that afternoon, 2nd and 3rd standard students stepped up for the shot put competition, where they demonstrated their prowess in launching the shot put as far as possible. While the students took another brief break, the teachers and staff took their turn at racing. The students went full force with their cheering as the teachers and staff rushed to the finish line! When the afternoon became evening, it was time for the closing ceremonies. Amidst much applause, the first, second and third place winners in each event were called up to the podium to be crowned and receive their medals.



At the conclusion of the Sports Day program, a short ceremony was held in recognition of the wonderful opportunity presented to the families through the Scholarship Program. With tears in their eyes, parent after parent shared how the scholarship has impacted the life of their child, opening the door for a future full of hope and opportunity.

"I'm a barber by profession. Only because of this scholarship program my daughter Sunmathi of LKG is able to study in this quality of English medium school with computer facilities. She is the first one in my family to study in a matriculation school! I thank the Isha Institution for providing a scholarship to my daughter."

Mr. Rangasami,

PTA Meetings

At the beginning of each term, parents are formally invited to attend a parent-teacher meeting at the school. This year's third-term parent-teacher meetings offered valuable opportunities to review the past year and discuss ideas for future improvements.

The educational methodology, including plans and ideas for what to bring in for the upcoming year, was a main focus of this year's third-term meetings. While students are gaining strong English reading skills, they still hesitate before expressing themselves in English orally or through writing. Therefore, a key shift in the upcoming year will be towards promoting greater fluency of spoken and written English. More student interaction and oral participation in class will be promoted through specific language learning activities that require students to think of their own responses to questions and scenarios. Creative writing opportunities will be offered through journal and story writing activities. Library periods will also be phased into each school over the coming year as the book reserves are built up. Allowing students to choose the books they are interested in will enhance their English vocabulary and build their confidence in speaking as they share the stories with their peers.



The library books will also provide a chance for students to practice their listening skills while teachers read stories. In addition, watching DVDs in English will be included in the curriculum this year. Teachers and students alike will improve their English while enjoying the engaging DVD programs ranging from basic letter and color learning to nature and discovery shows.

Review of the past year included discussion of the Indian economy and the fee structure at the schools. Fees will increase slightly from the previous year due to overall increases in prices in the local economy.

The schools in Nagercoil and Tuticorin explained their plans for clearing land to build playgrounds and sports fields. Transportation concerns were brought up by some parents because the bus routes currently do not extend to all of the houses. This problem will be addressed over time as busses are purchased by the schools. At present the schools are renting vans, which are small and have to make multiple trips both morning and evening. Busses will be more efficient and will allow for a wider area to be serviced by the school transportation. (See the related article on the following page for more information.) A handful of students living very far from the schools will continue to have to arrange for private transportation to drop them at designated pick up points on the school bus route.

“My husband is no more. I work as an agricultural coolie. The scholarship program has changed my daughter's life. My family and I are so happy to see my daughter studying in an English medium school!”

Mrs. Baby

Bus Inauguration

Freshly polished and decked with flower garlands and ribbon, the brand-new, bright yellow Isha Vidhya School bus was shining in the sun as Isha Vidhya students, their parents, teachers and coordinators, Isha Home School students and Ashram residents flocked to the middle of the old Mahashivarathri grounds at the Isha Yoga Center, eagerly awaiting the chief guest. Finally, his car swept by, Sadhguru slipped out, greeted everyone and after a brief inaugural address, cut the ribbon, and – much to the delight of everyone present – took the driver's seat. The children surely didn't need to be asked twice to get on the bus for its maiden trip! With the adults outside applauding, the children shouted happily while they made a few rounds of the field in the new bus. With the concluding distribution of sweets, the bus was befittingly inaugurated, ready for its routine shuttle service between the villages of the Isha Vidhya students and their school of Sandegounden Palayam, Coimbatore.



What's so special about a new school bus? As Sadhguru said, Isha Vidhya is probably the first rural school to have a bus of its own. Typically, rented vans are used to transport students to and from school. Since these vans are small and cannot hold many children, they have to make double trips each morning and afternoon to pick up and drop off all the students. This new bus is not only more convenient for the students and more reliable, saving two trips a day makes it an investment that pays in terms of money and the environment. Several donors who contributed to the Isha Vidhya funding last year made this possible.



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Visitors from Abroad



Visitors are always welcome to come and spend time at the Isha Vidhya schools and to meet the students, teachers and staff.

This past February, a group of 20 overseas guests made a trip out to the Isha Vidhya School in Sandegounden Palayam, where they spent the day meeting students, sharing in lunch, and participating in classes. With the newly inaugurated bus gassed up and ready to go, visitors were taken back to their childhood as roll was called before starting off. Everyone waved out the windows as the bus pulled away; it was a bumpy but fun ride!

Rolling into the drive, the principal and staff gave a warm welcome to the guests. After being whisked into the front office, guests heard a brief overview of the school and its goals. The visitors asked many questions, ranging from how the Isha Vidhya schools differ from government-run schools, to how much it costs to set up and run a school. After all the questions were answered, the tour of the school commenced.

The halls rang with sounds from each classroom, and floating through the air came the children's voices as they sang Karadi Rhymes: "I like mangos, big mangos, small mangos..." Through the windows, one could see the students stretching their little arms wide for big, then pulling them in tight for small, moving in time with the words. After watching a DVD about Isha Vidhya, one of the visitors got a surprise visit from the student whose education she is sponsoring. With tears of joy in her eyes, the donor accepted the beautiful bouquet of flowers her scholarship student presented to her. Hugging as they met for the first time, they introduced themselves and exchanged a few words. Soon, the little girl had to go back to join her class, but the moment they shared was something neither of them will forget.



The rest of the visitors were also in for a surprise. As they were led down the hall and into the 3rd grade classroom, they were greeted by the bright eyes and smiling faces of the third grade students waiting for them. As the visitors took their seats, the principal informed them they would be handing out the Sports Day medals to the third grade winners of the recent Sports Day competitions.

As the names were announced, delighted children proudly walked to the front of the room where the visitors took turns presenting them with the shiny medals. The children were thrilled to receive their Sports Day medals, and the visitors were just as excited to be take part in the presentation. The ceremony drew to a close with everyone gathering for a group photo! A perfect end to a perfect day.



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Volunteer Sharing....

My Experience of teaching in the Isha Vidhya School is really beyond words, because falling in love is truly beyond description. What I remember most are tiny hands wiping off a stone step as one precious little girl offers me a seat and with a smile in her voice says "sit here miss!" And then there was another time hanging out after school with two of my new small friends sitting and chatting with their chins resting, one on each knee. How polite they were, how eager they were, how bright-eyed they were, in short-how alive they were; what a joy to be around! I wanted to grab every one of them and take them home with me! I was able to read stories to them and listen to their precious comments. The staff was also amazing. What a beautiful experience and honor to be a part of the school for a few weeks.

Kim McInnis Detroit, Michigan USA

Scholarship Donor Sharing....

The school is surrounded by a field of sunflowers. I cannot tell you how beautiful it is!

I love going to India. This year though, was so very special because I met Duraiarasan. I sponsor Duraiarasan through Isha Vidhya's Scholarship Program, and he is 6 years old. Duraiarasan's school is in Erode, which is about a 3 hour car journey from the ashram.

When I met Duraiarasan, I was so excited!!!! And he was so nervous!

They pulled up a chair and I started to speak with him. Duraiarasan was very, very shy. He was trying so hard not to smile, while I made faces and showed him pictures of himself on my digital camera. Then he started to tell me about cricket and how he like to play. His little face lit up when he started talking about a famous cricket player. There he was!! There was Duraiarasan!

As we walked back to the car, the kids were outside practicing for their Sports Day. As I got in the car, they all waved and yelled goodbye. They looked like the sunflower field. Really!



My heart was so full! It made me teary, and when my driver told me to turn around, there was Duraiarasan outside the car waving to me.

Gail Burns, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

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Future Plans

The new academic year will be one of further growth:

more young students admitted; additional class rooms built; a new library period; increased audio-visual materials; and a doubling of the number of scholarships provided to students. Vitally, we will be concentrating on continuing to develop our learning methods and the technologies we use in our schools, with creating comfortable and confident use of English a particular focus.

Located in rural settings, most parents of Isha Vidhya students do not speak English and have rarely travelled farther than the nearest city. Isha Vidhya teachers also come from the local villages and speak English with regionalized accents. To compensate for the limited access our students have to English in their daily lives, computer and DVD programs are integrated into the curriculum.

Exposing students to a wide range of English accents at an early age will help them learn to speak English comfortably and to understand English beyond the regional accents they typically hear. This preparation will enable them to use English to communicate with the world beyond their villages. Already, the DVD and computer programs are having a noticeable impact. Students' English skills have improved over the past year, and we expect results to be even better this year with increased exposure to these mediums.

The students have already enjoyed various opportunities to put their English skills to the test when guests from across India and the world have come to the schools as volunteers or visitors. **Whether it's through volunteering, donating or visiting, we would love for you to get involved with Isha Vidhya. So would the children...**



You can make a difference! To find out how, visit our website at:

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Sadhguru's Message to the Teachers



You need to understand, that this is not just another job. We're building a nation' we're building a whole population; we are manufacturing the next generation of people. If we have focused, educated, inspired human beings, that generation of people, they will live well.

The coming year all of you should make this miracle happen in as big a way as it's possible. That's the best thing you can do for other lives. You give them food, you give them money, today they'll eat, tomorrow they'll forget. If you empower them to make their lives, this is the best thing we can do for another human being. Everyday you are creating that. You're not just doing a job; you're really making the lives of the next generation of people. Everyday when you go to school, its not a job, you're not going there for a salary; you're contributing in such a big way to make someone else's life.

It is like this: If you take a mango seed, this mango seed can become a million mango fruits and an enormous amount of sweetness, or you can just throw it on the rock and let it rot. A human being is also a seed like this; if you put him in the right kind of atmosphere, he can become something else altogether. So either they become bitterness or sweetness; it is in your hands.

Children are like seeds; whether you produce sweetness out of them or bitterness out of them is just what we do with them in their early age, and such a responsibility and such a privilege is in your hands; you must always understand and enjoy the trust and responsibility that is placed in your hands.

-Sadhguru



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