



April 2007

Dear Friends,

Asha Deep Vidyashram, the school I am running for the poor, is within two weeks of closing for summer vacation. Temperatures here are already well over 100 degrees – being a teacher or a student is difficult in this heat, especially when the power goes off! (These days it is typically off from about 10 am until 3 pm.) Starting about a month ago we changed the school hours to 7:30 am – 11:30 am so that we can take advantage of the cooler morning temperatures.

On March 24, we had a very successful 3rd annual children's performance. The program lasted about two and a half hours and included songs, dances, and drama. It was received with enthusiasm and congratulations as our best yet. We had better-than-ever parent attendance which was good because our chief guest, a retired physics university professor, gave a wonderful speech stating that, from his observation, the education that our children receive is the best education they could get anywhere at any price. It is a message that the parents need to hear because since they are paying only minimal fees, they naturally assume that their children are receiving poor quality education. But, thanks to the contributions we continue to receive, we have been able to keep up the standards that I am aiming for.

Now that we are wrapping up the 2006-2007 school year, I have begun to look forward to the changes and opportunities that next year will bring. Like last year, I plan to expand the school by adding 20 - 30 new students and running the school up through 3rd grade. (This year our highest grade was 2nd.) To do this I will need to rent one more room and hire another teacher. This will add an additional \$100/mo to our current running expenses of \$500/month.

On top of this I have other ideas for expansion which will depend on the generosity of our supporters. These include:

- A free immunization program. Currently mumps is spreading through the community; four of our school children have been infected. This could have been prevented if the children had been properly immunized. Est. cost for 80 children: \$100 for polio, DPT, and MMR. For an additional \$100 we could add the Hepatitis B vaccine.
- An extended school day. I would like to lengthen the school day to add an extra period in which we would rotate special classes like basic electrical repair, basic sewing and mending, physical education, dance, health and first aid, etc. I would have to raise the teacher's salaries if I ask them to stay longer. Est. cost: \$75/mo.
- If our school day is lengthened, it would be good to provide a nutritious snack to the children. Although kitchen facilities are available at our current location, we would need to buy a stove and some large pots and pans. We would also need to hire a cook. We can subsidize the feeding of 80 children per day for about \$250/mo.
- Starting this year, our students will be wearing a uniform. This will add to their respect in the community and help them take pride in their appearance. Cost this year: \$575.
- We have already received the donation of our first computer! If we received enough donations, and could procure at least three more computers, I would rent another room as a computer lab and start teaching computer skills. If not feasible this year, we will start this in the 2008-2009 school year.
- Sports equipment. Most of the equipment we bought 1 ½ years ago is now out of service. To buy new jump ropes, balls, badminton racquets, and cricket bats would cost about \$50.

I am excited about the advances our children have made this year. Our second grade final exam papers seem quite difficult to me; I can hardly believe that the children I started with three years ago have made such progress! And, talking to many of the parents after our annual program this year, I could tell that their enthusiasm for the school is growing as well as the hope in their hearts for their children's future.

love,
Connie