

August 2022 #1

Dear Friends,

After a three-year gap, I made a trip home to California this summer. It was wonderful to meet family and many old friends while I was home. I also had the opportunity to meet many new friends this time. Although I wasn't able to meet everyone I had hoped to, it was lovely seeing as many as I did.

I returned to Varanasi on June 24, just a few days before school re-opened on the 30th. You can imagine I hit the ground running, and I kept running through the entire month of July trying to get everything revved back up to full speed, the way we had been functioning before the covid pandemic. After operating on a minimum schedule last year, we are finally allowed to gather fully this year: morning assemblies, recess, lunch, arts classes, all-school programs! On top of enrolling new students and organizing all these activities (as well as our normal teaching of course), we had several guests this past month, we've been busy getting our graduates started on their new courses, we are re-vamping our website, and we've been overseeing the ongoing construction on our new school building.



We began serving lunch (after a two-year gap) on July 4th. It was the first sign that we were really getting back to normal. Our cooks have been doing a great job preparing a variety of tasty, as well as nutritious, food every day. The kids certainly enjoy it!

Lunchtime at  
Asha Deep



Finally! Students  
playing kabbadi  
during recess



After reopening, the first special occasion was announcing the winners of our summer competition. On top of completing

their summer homework packet, students could choose to work on a special project: write an essay, create a compendium of jokes, choreograph a group dance, make a labelled flower or leaf collection, make something out of used materials, or sculpt something from clay, for example. Prize distribution was our first special gathering of the year.

The whole school is finally allowed to assemble!  
Here the children are waiting to hear who has won prizes for projects completed during the summer break.

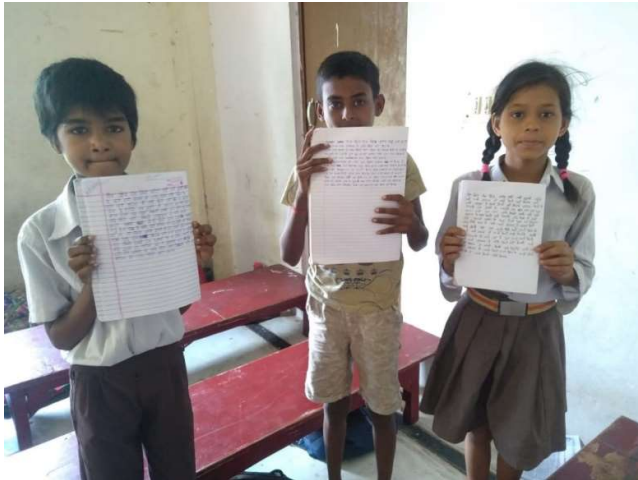




*Two of the summer competition clay item submissions*



It's been great to see that, due to the teacher training that we had last year (and continue to have in our reinstated Saturday teachers' meetings), our teachers are incorporating some fun teaching methods in the classroom. Every week I can peek in classrooms and see teachers using specialized dice, customized bingo boards, or other activities in teaching.



*4th graders showing off their writing*

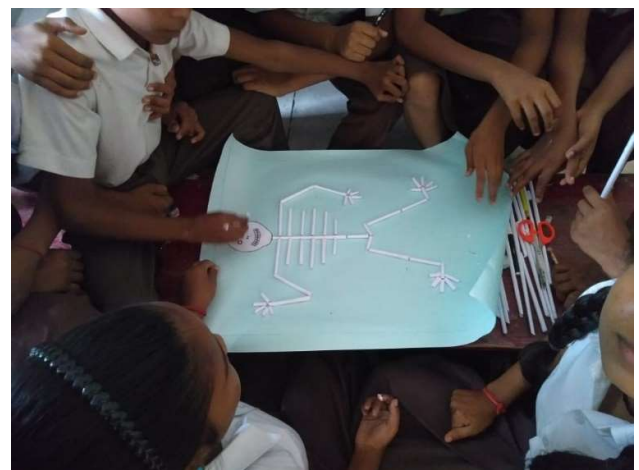


*Our 3rd graders made a chart showing the water cycle*



*Neeta Ma'am using "dice" to teach reading*

*Our 4th graders made a skeleton model*



Besides new, fun, teaching methods, our students were happy this year to get brand-new textbooks. We typically re-use our books for several years. Most of our books were in pretty bad shape by the end of last year. A special gift by a Lion's Club in Germany allowed us to replace several sets.

*About half of the books we purchased are shown here, along with kindergartners showing off their new Hindi books.*



Since we are now allowed to serve a midday meal, we are able to keep our

students until 3 p.m. This gives us time to add some extras into our schedule like library time, occasional outdoor games supervised by class teachers, weekly general knowledge quiz time, and weekly art classes. Every Wednesday our students attend either craft, drawing, dance, or tabla (Indian drum) classes, an enriching break from purely academic learning. We've really missed these activities the last two years!



*Some kids in craft class,*



*some learning tabla,*



*and some learning to draw.*

Kids are kids all around the world. Although I chuckled when I saw this photo, I'm pretty proud of this boy. Although he and his twin brother had been in 4th grade in their previous school, they were unable to recognize all the letters when they came for admission in Asha Deep in

2014. Of course, they were devastated when I told them that they would have to start all over in

kindergarten if they really wanted to learn. Incredibly, the boys agreed to start over. They cycle about 4 miles every day to attend our school, a place where they are actually learning! Here's Vikash (now in 5th grade) during library period, valiantly trying to make his way through a Hindi translation of one of the Harry Potter books:



In late July, we got good news about our 13 former students who took their 10th or 12th grade board exams this year. These are sets of five exams given over a period of a month. They are given outside the comfort zone of their own school and administered by unknown officials. Of our graduates, all six who took their 10th grade exams this year passed. And, although one student failed their 12th grade exams, the other six passed. The one who failed has said that he will continue to study; hopefully he will pass next year. One of our 12th graders, Vijay Vishwas was a "topper" in his school, scoring 82% on his board exams. He plans to study psychology at the local university this year.



Vijay (circled) being feted along with other top scorers in his school

Our first class to pass 8th grade passed in 2012. Now that some are our current results:

- Total # of students to pass 8th class at Asha Deep 2012-2022 = 92
- We have some kids studying in 9th and 10th this year, so of the 92, only 85 have had a chance to pass Class 10. Of these, 74 have passed. (87% pass rate)
- Out of 47 who could have passed Class 12 by now, 36 have passed. (77% pass rate)
- 24 students are still in the pipeline to complete class 12 in 2023 or beyond.
- 7 of our students have completed or are working on a vocational diploma.
- 7 of our kids have completed bachelor's degrees, and 12 more are working on one.
- 2 of our students have completed master's degrees and 2 more students are currently working on one.

When you compare our results with the fact that 67% of Indian kids start Class 10th, but only 80% of those students complete it, our 10th class pass rate is pretty good. Our 12th class pass rate, while not stellar, is fairly good. Considering that our students are the first in their families to pass even 8th grade, I'm happy to see that so many of them have continued to study even post-12th grade.

We are supporting 28 former students this year as they study in grade 9 or beyond. While most of them have been sponsored (thank you SO much to our wonderful sponsors!), I am still seeking funds for two students. Manvi passed Class 10 last year and will focus on science (biology, chemistry, and physics) in 11th and 12th grades. It's a difficult course of study, but she is a bright girl, and I'm sure she will do well. She is already partially supported, but I need another \$260 to fully fund her studies this year. Sandeep is one of our star students. He passed his 12th class exam with 93% marks, a very good score indeed. Now he is in his second year studying in Indraprasth College of Engineering near Delhi. He has also been partially supported but needs an additional \$800 to cover his costs this year. We welcome partial gifts to cover this large amount.



Manvi



Sandeep

Finally, many of you have asked about the progress on our new school. Construction is proceeding well; our ground floor walls are complete to about half their final height. Now, it's possible to stand inside each room and imagine how it will feel next year with benches and eager students. Just this week, work started on some interesting design features such as a large arched window in the front of the building. (The interior bricks will be removed once the arch is complete.)



Unbelievably, I haven't even covered all the things that happened in Asha Deep during July, but how much can you fit in one newsletter? At least you can catch up on some of the happenings here lately!

love,  
Connie

