



asti news

AMERICAN SERVICE TO INDIA • WINTER 2007

PRESIDENT'S DESK

ASTI Faces New Challenges to Help Needy in 2008

ASTI attracts donors who share its goals by providing funding for student scholarships, healthcare, sanitation and water supply improvements, instituting rural and vocational programs and even to support building projects for hospital, school and library additions. These programs are treasures that help ease suffering and offer hope. ASTI's Board is comprised of professionals who understand the importance of working together toward a common goal.

As in any organization, a few take hold and are ready to give their undying support for the cause — in ASTI's case, service — introduced to us by one of the great prophets of India, Swami Vivekananda. 'Serve God in man' was his urgent message. "Remember our ideal is "vairagyam' and service." Vairagyam means dispassion. Free from bias and impartiality — what greater ideal than this to serve all equally?

As I write this, I am thinking of one board member, another of ASTI's treasures, who stands out as a pillar of fairness and equanimity. An individual who uses his management skills to keep our barge on an even keel, he is dedicated to the service of God in man.

ASTI has caught the wind of suc-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



Produce provides income for women in Self Help Groups

"Pay as much attention to the means as the end."
—Vivekananda

Donors Provide the Pot of Golden Hearts at the End of the Rainbow

Is there really a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?

How perfect that would be. Or would it? We at ASTI realize that the REAL pot of gold is to be found in the hearts of our donors, brimming over with love for the poor. Sadly, we are only able to mention a few of them. Many have been highlighted in previous newsletters.

- 1) After reading an appeal from **Nishtha** in our 2006 newsletter, Board member Pankaj Ghosh contributed **\$11,000** towards the construction of a home for abused and abandoned women and girls. Mr. Ghosh donated **\$29,675** to **Ramakrishna Mission Narendrapur** for the memorial endowment for **Swami Krishnammoyananda**. Another **\$12,501** went to **RK Sarada Mission Matri Bhavan** maternity hospital in **Calcutta** for the primary health center.
- 2) A program for orphans was instituted at the **Ramakrishna Mission Sao Paolo in Brazil** as a result of a donation from **M.A. Stavropoulos** for **\$11,000**.
- 3) A Karnataka group led by Srinivas Bhat and Surya Prakash raised **\$16,000**, after expenses, for the tribal work of the **Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra**.
- 4) ASTI board member Bakul Zaveri has pledged **\$50,000** for general expenses to the **Ramakrishna Mission Belgaum**.
- 5) **Srilakshmi Mudigere, a manager for PayPal**, applied for a **\$2500 employee's grant from eBay** for medical equipment for a primary health program for **Nanritam**. The program is one of three run by professionals in medicine and technology in Calcutta.
- 6) **Kamakshi Rao** proposed **Prerana**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

**ASTI Board of Directors
2006–2007**

Barbara Piner
President

Daniel P. Haren
*Vice President
Consultant*

Ashok Ramnaneey
Second Vice President

Srinivas Murthy
*Chief Financial Officer
Controller*

Rajkumari Asrani, M.D.
*Secretary
Physician*

Bibek and Purnima Ray
Project Oversight India

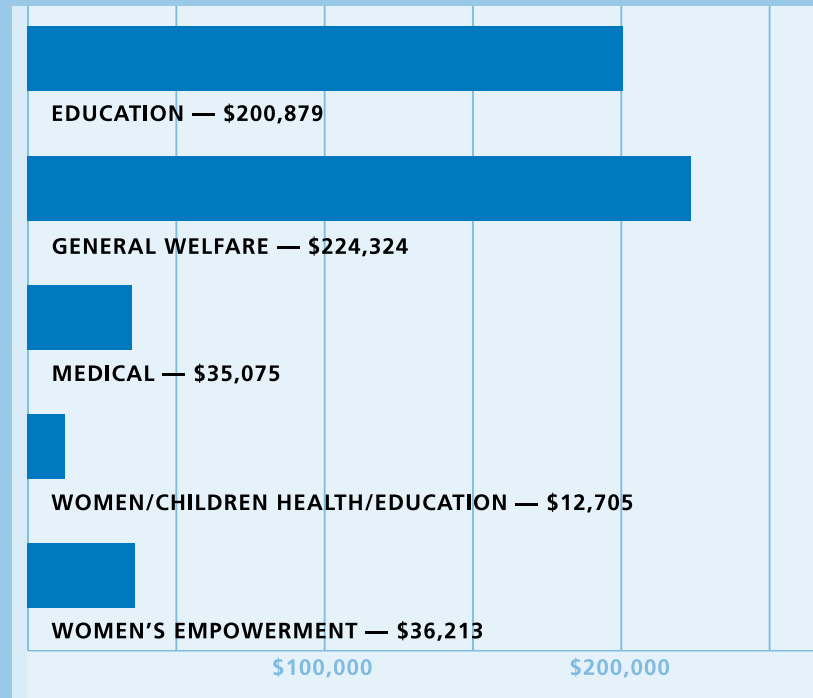
Cliff Johnson
Editor

Pankaj Ghosh
East Coast Representative

Bakul Zaveri
Project Cost Analyst

Thank You!

Total Funds Collected (Sept. 1, 2006–Aug. 31, 2007): \$950,000*
Funds Sent to India (2006–07): \$509,195



*includes funds held for future distribution.

*“Take up one idea, make that one idea your life; think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, and every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone.
—Vivekananda*

ASTI's Funding Policy

Each organization funded by ASTI must be registered as a non-profit organization and have Foreign Currency Registration Act (FCRA) authorization, which is required by both the Government of India and ASTI.

ASTI sends 100% of all designated donations, and offers donors the advantage of a tax deduction for their donations.

ASTI's funding base is growing and needs your support for secretarial expenses and office supplies (2007 total: \$9,833).

PLEASE HELP WITH OFFICE EXPENSES

\$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 \$25 Other

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

ZIP

EMAIL

(AREA CODE) PHONE

President's Desk

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cess because of her financial managers — first Peter Pruce, who we eulogized in our last newsletter, and now Srinivas Murthy, who guides us through this ocean of service with his wise counsel and his uncompromising integrity. He has been a teacher and friend to this president. The balance is perfect: I, a classroom teacher, have the tendency to nurture and lead with the heart. Murthy, an engineer, leads with the head but never loses sight of the ideal that this work, a labor of love, requires: a firm and dispassionate mind to assess where the greatest good can be delivered.

Economist Article

In a recent issue of *The Economist* an article on humanitarian aid discusses how standards must be such that when donors show their compassion to the latest disaster or epidemic, money will not be wasted or diverted. Auditors' accounts must be open and readily available on request. Our problems do not approach the level described in this article. Nevertheless, one worries about what happens to an organization built purely on ideals.

It seems that what happens is that it attracts persons like Srinivas Murthy, a former project manager, controller and presently consultant to one of the largest utility companies in the country.

Murthy reminds us that good management means constant assessment and re-assessment. Along with realistic evaluation of the programs with which it works, a non-profit like ASTI can continue to draw generous donors who share its ideals and goals.

As an institution, ASTI has to grow and develop as much as any person. An institution draws its own life breath from the sacrifice, love and dedication of all who participate in its ideal of service. I am grateful to all who give funds, service and support. The donors and providers, "our treasures," are discussed at length in this newsletter.

Read more at www.asti1.org

ASTI's Pot of Gold

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in Bangalore apply for a grant from **Capital Group Companies**, which approved **\$25,000** for Prerana's student sponsorship program in higher education for qualified poor students.

- 7) **The Deshpande Foundation** continues to support programs under the umbrella of **Prerana**. Since 2006, the Foundation has donated **\$84,500**.
- 8) **The Kundu Foundation** continues to support schools by building libraries and providing sponsorships under the umbrella of **Chak-Kumar Milan Sangha in Medinipur** with a total pledge of **\$50,000**.
- 9) **Amar and Tapati Lahiri** provided **\$135,000** for the children's ward and neo-natal wing at the **RKM Seva Pratishthan**. Amar's parents **Durgadas and Anima Lahiri** and Tapati's parents **Phanibusan and Uma Sanyal** are memorialized on plaques on both wings. **The Lahiris** sent **West Bengal**

Memorial Children's Ward Inaugurated at Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata with Lahiri Bequest

Thanks to a bequest from Amar and Tapati Lahiri, ASTI was able to donate more than six million Indian rupees (\$135,000.00) for the **Durgadas and Anima Lahiri and Phanibusan and Uma Sanyal wards**, whose honor is memorialized on plaques in the Pediatric Ward. The 70-bed ward includes an advanced neo-natal care unit.

The construction of the Children's Ward at Seva Pratishthan is now complete. Swami Gahanandaji Maharaj, President, and Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission inaugurated it on July 24, 2007. The new annex, including the children's wing and additional departments, was inaugurated on the day of the Platinum Jubilee Celebration of RKM, Seva Pratishthan. Many dignitaries, including the Governor of West Bengal, the Health Minister, the Mayor of Kolkata in addition to about 5000 others, attended this grand inaugural function.

It is amazing to know that the RKM Seva Pratishthan Hospital is the biggest non-governmental hospital in West Bengal. It is the Lahiris' dream that the advanced pediatric and intensive neo-natal facilities will help reduce child mortality. Swami Sarvalokananda stated that 20% of the beds would be free for the treatment of very poor children.

ASTI wishes all successes for this noble venture.

Voluntary Health Authority

\$21,500 to install 20 bathrooms in Medinipur, West Bengal. A shelter for street children run by **VESC Calcutta** received **\$18,000** for expansion from the Lahiris.

- 10) **The Raha Family Trust** has provided ongoing scholarships for meritorious students at six of the top schools run by **the Ramakrishna Mission** and the **Jagadish Bose National Science Talent** for the last six years.
- 11) **The Sri Devendra Nath Biswas and Srimati Sailabala Memorial Scholarships** program at the **RKM Narendrapur Residential College** was established by Prof. Biswas of Alaska. Interest from this **\$200,000** memorial will provide opportunities for meritorious students with financial difficulties to study at this highly prestigious residential college.

We treasure every donation, large or small, and thank all who have supported this ideal of service put forth by Swami Vivekananda. We celebrate and thank all who embrace this ideal of service to the children of the Lord.



Durgadas and Anima Lahiri Pediatric Ward

An Urgent Appeal for Help to ASTI from SEWA

As reported in year 2006 (ASTI Newsletter, winter 2006), Deena Bandhu is an organization operating in the outskirts of the city of Chamarajanagar, near Mysore in the state of Karnataka. Deena Bandhu is the home of homeless. The special interest of ASTI and SEWA has been the welfare, health and education of girls, women and boys in these areas. Deena Bandhu has been a grand success by any standard in providing a stress-free home for 45 orphan boys.

There has been a great and urgent need to start a “Deena Bandhu for



Girls” in the same area to serve girl orphans. At this point there are about 12 girl orphans living in rental homes nearby and using Deena Bandhu school facilities. In order for this effort to be fully effective, Deena Bandhu for Girls must have suitable and independent facilities, like dormitory with boarding and vocational training and educational facilities, such that they shall have an independent and self-reliant future.

On March 17, 2006, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) aired a special segment on “U N launches effort to fight human trafficking.” This news segment showed the plight of raped and HIV-affected children

and women in the city of Hyderabad, India. A victim of gang rape herself, Miss Sunitha Krishnan, an activist, started an organization called “Prajwala” (Eternal Flame), which now has benefited over 5,000 young orphan victims of rape and incest. The similar problem exists all over India, including the City of Chamarajanagar, where Deena Bandhu for Girls has been in its infancy but needs to be expanded as soon as possible.

General Secretary

Professor Jayadeva, the honorary General Secretary, has been the central pillar of this organization since its inception fifteen years ago. Professor Jayadeva is extremely dedicated and has been working tirelessly throughout for the success of Deena Bandhu; indeed, the bulk of the credit for the success of this organization goes to Professor Jayadeva, who has chosen to remain single and dedicate his entire time and life to this noble cause. Both ASTI and SEWA invited Professor Jayadeva to travel to the United States in order to raise funds specifically for the Deena Bandhu for Girls. Unfortunately, the American Consul in Chennai, India, denied a visitor visa to the Professor and hence we must take up this task urgently on his behalf with double energy and efforts.

In light of the above background, both ASTI and SEWA humbly request you to rise to the occasion and donate resources generously. For more information, please call SEWA Action Committee: Mrs. Shakunthala Shanker at 916-488-8776, Dr. D.V. Giri at 925-939-6280, or Narayan Gowda at 530-756-1488. All checks should be made out to ASTI and designated to “Deena Bandhu Hostel for Girls.”

“The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood — that marvelous, unselfish, all suffering, ever forgiving mother.”

—Vivekananda

More Help is Needed

Start Made Toward Building Sarada Bhavana Shelter

The first floor of the Sarada Bhavana Shelter for Destitute Women, constructed by Nishtha 24 South Parganas, West Bengal, is scheduled for completion by October, 2007 — in part thanks to ASTI Board member Pankaj Ghosh, who was inspired to make a generous donation after reading the appeal for Nishtha in ASTI’s last newsletter.

Mr. Ghosh made an initial donation of \$11,100 this spring to inaugurate the Shelter. The Shelter will include a training center, a hostel staff quarters and a community hall when completed. Classes will be offered in basic skills to help the women achieve greater independence.

Swami Suparanananda laid the foundation of the Sarada Bhavana Shelter with a worship service, arati and a distribution of Prasad was offered after the service.

More than 300 women attended the dedication. “The women were so enthusiastic, pure and committed that I was overwhelmed,” said the swami.

Many of the women at the Shelter will participate in self-help groups and gain a sense of dignity and satisfaction. It will not only be a haven for the women who live there, but a shining light of hope to women who suffer from abandonment and neglect and are in need of food, shelter, dignity and peace of mind.

ASTI is appealing for another \$11,000 to complete the second floor of the Sarada Bhavana.

Two Amazing Young Students

American students spend their summer vacation working in an orphanage in Bangalore

"I believe that all people are equal and that suffering is equally important, no matter where you live or what color skin you have or what religion you are." Although this could have been part of a political speech in the 2008 election, it is not. Darin Yankowitz wrote it in a recent email to ASTI President Piner. Darin and his friend Daniel Brett are both volunteers with the Lovedale orphanage outside Bangalore. Both young men have university backgrounds; Daniel recently graduated from Tufts University in Boston with a degree in Economics. Darin is in his final year at UC San Diego.

To address the health problems they encountered at the orphanage, the men developed a nutrition program, which was approved by the director. Relatives and friends donated more than the \$2,000 the men considered necessary as an annual budget for the program. ASTI agreed to facilitate the financial arrangements.

Living in India

Some of Daniel's reactions to living and working in India as a volunteer deserve mention: "My experience here in India has more than exceeded my expectations. Adapting to a foreign culture, teaching in an Indian K-8 school, and living with children in rural Bangalore have yielded unexpected surprises, along with a real change in my personal outlook.

"My most vivid first impression, I think, was my realization that these children have nothing, no toys, no parents, no video games and they are still happy. They are children, and because they have no expectation for what life should be, they take nothing for granted."

Darin echoes this awakening to life on the other side of the world: "I've learned a lot from my experience here.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that my life has been irrevocably changed. Living in rural India and seeing the children who have practically nothing be so happy has made me keenly aware of both the materialism of American culture, and how unnecessary material objects are to happiness."

ASTI was founded more than a quarter of a century ago as a response to similar needs of the less fortunate in India. It is ASTI's privilege to play some small role in helping these two young men in their commendable program of service.

"This world will always continue to be a mixture of good and evil. Our duty is to sympathize with the weak and to love even the wrongdoer. The world is a grand moral gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually. Fourthly, we ought not to be fanatics of any kind, because fanaticism is opposed to love. And further, the calmer we are and the less disturbed our nerves, then shall we love and the better will our work be."

—Vivekananda

Appeal from RKM Residential College, Narendrapur

Upgrading Admissions and Records Office

Note from the Principal's Desk:

"Modernization is the need of the hour. We want to do away with the old system of "hard copy" files and papers in our office section and computerize paperwork for greater efficiency and technological friendliness. We have already begun work, and are in the process of preparing new software consisting of the following five modules: i) Admission, ii) Scholarship, iii) Fees, iv) Results and v) Report-Generation.

The total cost of the project will be around Rs. 500,000 Rs.200,000 for the software, including Oracle 10g and OS, networking and server, and Rs.200,000 for 5 PCs and Rs. 100,000 for printer, UPS and networking.

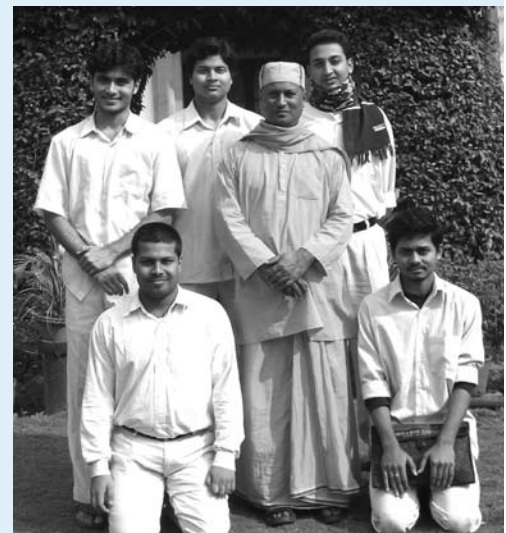
We cannot raise this huge amount of money from our students; that is usually done in other institutions. In keeping with the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, our motto is quality education at minimum cost. Besides, many of our students are economically poor and enjoy scholarship.

We therefore appeal to our generous donors to provide us with the necessary funds for the renovation of our office administrative system."

—Swami Suparanananda

For more information on this project, visit www.rkmcnarendrapur.org

ASTI's goal is \$10,000!



Principal & scholars at Narendrapur Residential College

IN THE STATE OF BIHAR

Ramakrishna Mission in Bihar Needs \$11,000 for Slum Program

Fifty boys and girls from the slums of Chapra enjoy an afternoon snack and tutorial assistance thanks to an after-school program run by the Ramakrishna Mission. The students, grades one through five, come from some of the poorest families in the area.

According to Swami Muniswarananda, Secretary, the students are also provided school supplies and perhaps their only daily meal. He said the program has made some progress, but much more needs to be done. "We earnestly seek assistance in moving ahead in the service of humanity," he said. "Help in any way will be heartily welcomed."

The mission needs a donation of \$11,000 (five lakh of rupees) to operate the program. A donation to ASTI will help expand the enrollment and also provide medical care for the children and their families.

Students' Home Seeks \$5,000 in Aid

The students' home of the Ramakrishna Mission in Patna provides a residential school for twenty boys of poor families. The home offers free lodging, food, school supplies, and tutoring and medical attention to the resident boys. The cost of providing these services runs \$5,000 per year, at a cost of \$250 per boy.

"We beg donors to open their hands and hearts and support our program, where the infrastructure has already been established, and only the annual expense of running the program is needed," said Swami Mangalamananda, program director.

Donors can sponsor one child at \$250 a year or sponsor four boys at \$1,000 per year.

Funds Needed to Complete Hostel in Kadapa

The Ramakrishna Math - Ramakrishna Mission Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh was started in 1910 and has been serving the people in various ways through the decades. Several projects are underway at the Mission under the supervision of revered Swami Atmavidananda Maharaj, Secretary, who arrived in 2005 the year after it became an independent center of the Ramakrishna Order.

Swami Vivekananda saw hope for the progress of our Nation in the young eyes of children. It has always been the endeavor of the Monks of the Ramakrishna Order to SILENTLY, through example and action, impact youngsters with the dreams that Swami Vivekananda had for the progress of India. Observing the Monks'

lives and growing up in a disciplined environment, these youngsters become responsible and eminent citizens making significant contributions to society.

After the creation of a solid infrastructure with boundary walls, monks quarters, wells and roads on a ten-acre plot, the construction of a students' home for 30 students began this year. Other needed facilities: a study hall, dining hall, etc. will be constructed at a cost of \$122,500 and may take some time to complete. However, starting from the June 2007 academic year, 10 students were accepted and the construction began. At this time the 10 boys are housed in the monks' quarters.

The boys are selected from rural areas on economic and merit bases. Each will be provided with free boarding, lodging and transport costs. In deserving cases, uniforms, school fees, etc. will also be provided. The cost is estimated about \$360 per student per year, or \$30 per month.

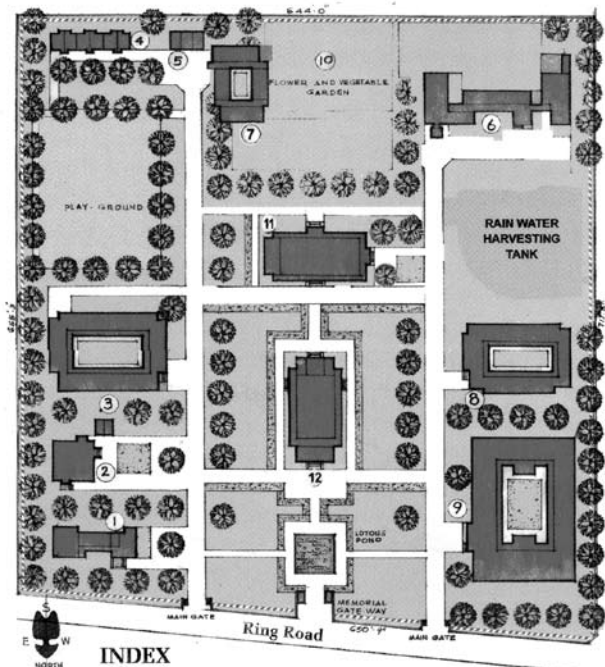
We sincerely appeal to our friends to sponsor one or more boys. **The cost is \$360 per student annually.**

ASTI's top priority this year is the construction of this home, the Sri Ramakrishna Balakshramanam, for meritorious students from economically poor and rural areas. The Mission needs the whole-hearted support from one and all.

ASTI's goal is \$20,000 or more for this home.

PLEASE GO TO WWW.RKM-KADAPA.ORG FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PROJECTS UNDERWAY AT RKM KADAPA

MASTER PLAN OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, KADAPA, ANDHRA PRADESH.



- INDEX
- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Office Building | 7. Dormitory for High School Boys |
| 2. Health Centre | 8. Hostel For HRD Institute |
| 3. Primary School | 9. HRD Institute |
| 4. Workers' Quarters | 10. Agricultural Training Plots |
| 5. Vehicles' Garage | 11. Sabhangana |
| 6. Monastic Quarters | 12. Universal Temple of Sri Ramakrishna |



WEST BENGAL APPEAL

Hijaldiha Vivekananda Seva Samity

Registered since 1989, this Samity in the Bankura district of West Bengal, an area ravaged by poverty, is providing opportunities for children to receive quality education for grades I-V. The path has not been easy; the director is persistent and dedicated and could not otherwise survive the political drama rampant in this area. His name is **Bikash Palodhi** and he is another of ASTI's heroes. Forestalling the constant demand for bribes and striking rickshaw drivers, he has been fighting the battle since the inception of the Samity (or school). During my last visit, the driver of the eight-seated school bus had demanded more money for transporting the students. Palodhi could not afford to give the man a raise, so the driver quit.

Parents were bringing their children to school on scooters and cycles, so grateful were they for the education their children receive at this school.

The Samity not only operates a school, it also oversees relief efforts during disasters — caused by frequent flooding — for the Ramakrishna Mission. Director Palodhi runs health and sanitation camps as well as activities concerning rural development and environmental awareness.

—Barbara Piner

ASTI hopes to raise \$2,500 for school expenses.

ASTI Sponsorships Offer Americans Diverse Ways to Help

We at ASTI always feel inspired when we visit the organizations profiled in this newsletter and witness first hand the huge impact dedicated workers can make.

All sponsorships are computed on a yearly basis. The following organizations score high on our list.

Children's Residential School

Deepannita Braille Institute, West Bengal

Sponsor a blind child: \$235

Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, B.R.Hills, Karnataka

Sponsor a tribal boy: \$235

Ramakrishna Pally Unnayan Sangha, Ramnagar, WB

Sponsor an orphan boy: \$250

Ramakrishna Mission Belgaum, Ramnagar, WB

Feed one hundred children weekly: \$140

Deena Bandhu Trust, Karnataka

Sponsor an Orphan: \$235



Sarada Seva Sangha children from Shibpur salute the divine in you. Thank you for supporting these children of the Divine. Go to www.asti1.org for information on all the organizations listed on this page.

Education

Chethana Trust, Mysore

Sponsor a mentally challenged or epileptic child: \$135

Ramakrishna Mission Kadapa

Sponsor one student annually: \$235

Hijaldiha Vivekananda Seva Samity, Bankura WB

Daily meal for one child: \$30

Fan for one classroom: \$50

School supplies and transportation per child: \$30

Bhurkunda School for Mentally Challenged Hooghly, WB

School supplies and transport one child: \$100



Kalyania Child Welfare Program for children of working mothers

Sponsor a child: \$100

Medical

Sarada Seva Sangha Shibpur, W.B,

One cataract operation: \$150

Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal

Leprosy and TB Treatment: \$150

Nishtha, West Bengal Home for the Elderly

Room and board one: \$216

Rehabilitation into her community: \$96

Dr. Raji Asrani Tells of Her Dedication to ASTI's Goals

There is no more thankless job in an organization than that of recording secretary. Yet for the past several years, Board member Dr. Raji Asrani has volunteered to do that tedious but necessary task. It is certainly not what she had first in mind to undertake!

When Raji heard of ASTI in 1985, she found herself eager to join. "As a medical doctor," she told us, "I had a strong desire to serve the poor of India. Later, this desire developed in my support of Mobile Medical Units, enabling doctors and nurses to serve the needy in rural areas."

Raji also has a strong interest in the education and general welfare of children in these areas. "Many poor rural people cannot afford even the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. I hoped



Funds needed for Flood Relief West Bengal

to help them through ASTI, which has always given such needs a high priority."

Raji knew she wanted to make medicine a career from the time she was in the ninth grade.

Very soon she decided to specialize in OB-GYN.

After coming to the United States in 1972, she broadened her field of interest. "I wanted to learn the art of pain relief for OB patients.

"In India at the time there was no way to relieve pain from women in labor. This led me to further specialize in anesthesiology at the University of Illinois Medical Center in Chicago." Raji retired this year from the UC Irvine Medical Center (CA) after thirty years service as a physician. "I feel blessed to have realized my dream of becoming a physician and OB-GYN pain management specialist. And it is of particular satisfaction to me that I have been able to use my medical knowledge to serve many of the projects supported by ASTI."

You can be certain, Raji, that ASTI as well is grateful for your service to India's poor and needy these past twenty-two years.



New mothers in good hands at RK Sarada Matri Bhavan

astinews

American Service to India
P.O. Box 2456
Costa Mesa, CA 92628-2456

Phone: (714) 662-1661

Fax: (714) 662-1663

E-mail: bpinerasti@sbcglobal.net

Web: www.asti1.org or www.americanservicetoindia.org

Non-profit Org.

U.S. Postage

PAID

Permit. No. 4278

Santa Ana, CA 92702-9999