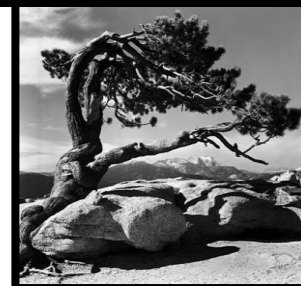# ASHRAYA
Project Terra Firma
Complementary Education in Rural Higher Primary Schools
Hanur Taluk, Karnataka
Project Overview Nov 2013

Summary & Accomplishments to Date

ASHRAYA started Project Terra Firma in 2008 with a goal of taking up a large scale initiative a single area in which it can be the prime executor as opposed to being a funding agency for other NGOs. The aim was to take up an area (educational focus and geographical location) that is scalable, repeatable and has high impact on a large number of beneficiaries. The state governments in India have done a lot for primary schools (1st to 8th standard) in rural parts of the country, pouring in investments in school buildings, trained teachers, text books etc. However, children passing out of these schools have gaps in many areas such as handwriting, math science and creative skills. These gaps are higher in rural areas (i.e. farther away from the main cities). Our aim was to provide complementary education that could enhance the above mentioned skill sets of children passing out of these schools; using well proven methods in **experiential and fun learning**. We selected Hanur Taluk (sub-division of Hanur Taluk) since it is primarily rural (200 Kms away from Bangalore) with very few NGOs active in the area.

In Dec 2008, we embarked on **Project Terra Firma** in partnership with the then BEO of Hanur Taluk. To date, we have completed four phases of Project Terra Firma and activities in Hanur Taluk. **ASHRAYA has spent close to $21K over the last 5 years**. We have been visiting the project area every 3 weeks and have invested in a stable, reliable and passionate staff that is responsible for establishment and operations of our projects. **To date, over 3,000 students have benefited from our projects**. The table below shows the summary of accomplishments to date.

Phase	Years	Project Name	Expenditure, $
Phase I	2008, 2009	Create One Model School (Kannur School)	894
		Develop Copywriting Skills in 17 Schools - Part 1	1,289
		Conduct Fun Projects in Kannur School	2,263
Phase II	2009, 2010, 2011	Develop Copywriting Skill in 17 Schools - Part 2	1,289
		Establish Library in Kannur School	2,000
		Establish Science and Nature Clubs in Kannur School	2,500
		Operate Library in Kannur School	1,000
		Operate Science & Nature Clubs in Kannur School	2,500
Phase III	2012	Establish and Operate Libraries in 5 More Schools	7,000
		Continue Library Operations in Kannur School	1,000
Total Project Expenditure to Date			**21,735**

Project Components

Project Terra Firma is made up of the following main components:

1. **<u>Create Model Schools</u>**: A model school is defined as a school that has a dedicated and motivated set of teachers and headmaster/headmistress; displayed proficiency in at least one area; has a clean and hygienic infrastructure and study environment; and wherein teachers have expressed interest and desire to do better. Our goal is to showcase a model school to motivate other schools to improve performance on their own. To accomplish this, we identify specific gaps they have in terms of materials covering basic amenities and all skills (math, science, creativity, sports, handwriting, general knowledge and music) and supply the materials to fill these gaps. Identifying and creating model schools are precursor to conducting any other activities below.

2. **<u>Improve Handwriting and Creativity Skills</u>** We supply materials (copywriting books, pencils, erasers and paper; drawing books, crayons and paint boxes). We administer tests at the beginning to identify scope for improvement at the individual, grade and school levels. We inspect the usage of materials and improvement in skills on a continuous basis (once every month). We administer another test at the end of the year to track improvement at the individual and school levels and award prizes to the top students, teachers and schools.

3. **<u>Run Fun Educational Projects</u>**: We work with the teachers to select 20 students per school. We divide the 100 students into groups of 5 each and run fun educational projects covering all areas (Arts & Crafts, Engineering and Science, Nature & Environment, Math and Statistics, History & Geography, Social Studies; & Writing & Literature). Each project has an assigned teacher to guide and monitor progress. We describe the activities to the project teams (only at a high level so that we can promote independent thinking) at the outset. Each project team is given the permission to spend up to Rs. 600 on materials towards the project (as per the project needs) which is funded by ASHRAYA. We track progress on a periodic basis and provide guidance and feedback. We conduct a Fun Day Competition at the end of the fiscal year and bring in independent judges (teachers from other schools; and administrators from the BEO office). We allow school children from all schools to come and attend the Fun Day and view the displays. We select the top 5 projects across all projects and distribute awards to students and teachers.

4. **<u>Set Up and Run Libraries:</u>** Our libraries provide instant access to knowledge for all students. We make the library a fun place to be through activities. We make book reading exciting through story-telling and activity based learning. We also integrate the library with the school agenda; and link books to the curriculum. We make the library actively drive advancement in reading abilities and learning levels. Our libraries have bright color environment with murals from ethic art (Warli and Pithora) painted by local artisans. Each library is equipped with 400 to 600 books covering all subjects including lending and reference books; educational game kits and art material; and art materials as well. Each full time librarian is trained on story-telling, activities and programs. We also subscribe to multiple children magazines and newspapers. In each school, we form a library committee with the librarian, key teachers, the headmaster and top 3 students. We use a GROWBY classification scheme for all books to promote advancement in reading abilities and learning levels. We classify all students at beginning of year into GROWBY scheme and track progress on a monthly basis. We work with the teachers to link books to the curriculum. In each school, we ensure that there are two dedicated library periods per week for each class. During these periods, the librarian follows an activity calendar that is rotated over a 10 week basis. Activities include activities-based learning (tied to MLLs) around story books; arts and craft; education board games to promote math, science and engineering skills; "Book of the Month Club" for select books and students; break time quizzes with prizes to winner; treasure hunts with clues hidden in pages of different books; dressing-up and drama competitions around famous books and characters; class research projects using book material; and speed reading competitions. We end the year with a Library Day in which all school

students come together and exhibit their work from the year before as well conduct competitions (speed reading, storytelling etc.). We award prizes to the best exhibits (art work, dramas, speed reading etc.) and winners of competitions.

5. **Set Up and Run Science and Nature Clubs:** We work with teachers in each school and identify 20 students per school for each club – Science and Nature. The science club has an active science lab with experiments. The club also revolves around conducting experiments and arranging visits to science museums. The nature club has an active biology lab and involves trips to nature spots in the vicinity (e.g. botanical gardens, wildlife sanctuaries, plantations and adventure treks). We work with headmasters/mistresses of each school and identify 3 teachers to run and manage each club. We train the teachers on running the clubs and set up session plans that last the whole year. The activities in each club revolve around the following: (a) Experiments, (b) Field Trips; (c) Educational videos; (d) Talks by experts from Bangalore; and (5) Games. We equip the clubs with necessary materials. Each student in each club is required to maintain project reports of each activity. We monitor progress of the clubs as they meet once a week (in alternating schools each week). At the end of the year, the students are asked to set up experiment/educational displays. We conduct a Club Day Competition at the end of the fiscal year and bring in independent judges (teachers from other schools; and administrators from the BEO office). We allow school children from all 5 schools to come and attend the Club Day and view the displays. We will select the top 2 projects for each club and distribute awards to students and teachers.

Progress to Date

We successfully piloted all our project components at Kannur School in Hanur Taluk from 2009 to 2011 (fun projects, library, science and clubs); and established a replicable and repeatable model to be applied at other schools. In 2012, we worked with the BEO of Hanur Taluk to extend this working model to 5 additional schools. The BEO also helped drive these activities to success through high level visibility, leadership and sponsorship. In 2013, we focused primarily on the 6 libraries and stabilized the operations of these libraries. We proved that we could scale the operations of activity based libraries to a large number of schools without eroding quality and impact. Here are the main accomplishments of 2013:

1. Nominated Vivek Ethiraj as Main India Representative. Vivek is based in Bangalore and works as a Delivery Manager in MatrixStream Inc. He visits the project area every month.
2. Created a library training manual and trained all 6 librarians on activity based learning
3. Initiated project status calls every Sunday between the Vasuki, Vivek and Savukar Raj
4. Successfully executed all activities in our activity based learning program through 2 rounds
5. Started a full-fledged art program run by a dedicated art teacher at all the 6 schools. 20 artistically inclined students in each school participate in this program
6. Conducted 3 rounds of GROWBY tests for 3000 children in schools to track progress of reading abilities
7. Started creating monitor dashboards on a monthly basis which we present to head masters, teachers and the Hanur Taluk BEO
8. Started the process to incorporate Ashraya in India so that we can staff and hire full time employees in India to run our projects.

We plan to end the year with a grand Library Day across all 6 schools (3000 students) in which the best exhibits from the various activity based programs will be displayed and prizes distributed for the best exhibits.

You can visit the "Past Projects" section of the website to go through the project reports of Project Terra Firma (Phases I, II and II) over the years 2008 to 2012.

Plan for 2014

In the year 2014, we would like to continue and leverage our success to expand our activities further

1. Establish libraries in 6 more model schools that we will select in collaboration with the BEO
2. Continue to operate the 6 currently operational libraries at the same operational level
3. Continue the art program in the 6 currently operational libraries
4. Establish and operate science clubs in the 6 schools we currently operate in
5. Implement the fun project program in the 6 schools we currently operate in (postponed form 2013)

Please see below the funding requirements overview for 2014 by project.

Project Name	Funding Per Project Unit		No. of Project Units (Schools)	Funding for all Project Units	
	Rs	$		Rs	$
1) Establish New Libraries & Operate Them for One Year	**75,267**	**1,254**	6	**451,600**	**7,527**
2) Operate Currently Operational Libraries Per Year	**40,267**	**671**	6	**241,600**	**4,027**
3) Operate Currently Operational Art Programs (In Libraries) Per Year	**23,000**	**383**	6	**138,000**	**2,300**
4) Establish Science Clubs and Operate Them for One Year (In Currently Operational Schools)	**42,333**	**706**	6	**254,000**	**4,233**
5) Implement and Run Fun Projects for One Year (In Currently Operational Schools)	**16,000**	**267**	6	**96,000**	**1,600**
Total Funding Sought Across All Projects				**1,181,200**	**19,687**