

Non-Profit Organization providing Assistance to the Rural and Physically Challenged Children and Youth in India for Education, Vocational Training and Income Generation

ASHRAYA



*Hey Look! The pine tree is bending
Over the rocks like a frail old man blessing
A burly child with his stick.
The scorching sun whips its back,
And the heat smacks its branches,
Shaking off crumbled leaves of shade
That scramble for refuge in craggy folds.*

*As God's children go on a star-hunt,
The world of ASHRAYAs stands on its head,
A top spinning in perfect harmony.*

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ASHRAYA

Project Terra Firma

Complementary Education Programs in Rural Higher Primary Schools Annual Report 2013-14

This document provides an overview and current status of **Project Terra Firma**, a complementary education program executed by ASHRAYA since 2008 in Rural Higher Primary Schools in Hanur Taluk, Karnataka.

1. Introduction to ASHRAYA

ASHRAYA (www.ashraya-usa.org) is a non-profit organization based in the US, established in 1991 with an aim to provide assistance to the physically challenged and rural communities in India in the areas of education, vocational training and income generation. Our focus is on various challenges such as visual, aural, mobility, learning and rural poverty; and on different age groups, i.e. education for children, vocational training for teenagers and income generation for adults. We strive to use assistive technologies wherever feasible so as to increase sustainability and leverage. ASHRAYA is registered in the state of New Jersey and has obtained tax-exempt status 501(c)(3) from IRS. Ashraya is also registered as a non-profit organization in India.

From 1991 to 2008, ASHRAYA was mainly been involved in funding innovative projects executed by other organizations. ASHRAYA provided services to select India-based welfare organizations chiefly working in the disabilities sector the organizations such as NAB (Bombay), NAB (Chennai), BPA (Ahmedabad), Mobility India (Bangalore) and MP Blind Welfare Association (Indore). We have funded projects worth ~\$250K to date and have had brief joint funding partnerships with bigger organizations such as America India Foundation and HHH (Heart and Hand for the Handicapped). The following link provides rich information about all our past projects since 2002 (<http://www.ashraya-usa.org/past-project/>). ASHRAYA is run with very little overheads (<2%) which are fully absorbed by its founders. To date, ~50% of funds have come from contributions from the two founders ASHRAYA (Vasuki Subbarao, President; and Jayanthi Rajagopal, Treasurer) and Chief Patron (Ashwin Rangan); while the rest have come from private donors and partner organizations such as AIF. Both the founders currently live at 105 New England Avenue, Apartment A5, Summit NJ 07901.

2. Introduction to Project Terra Firma and Arivina Aramane

ASHRAYA started **Project Terra Firma** in 2008 when the two founders of were stationed in India on a personal assignment. Our goal was to take up a large scale initiative covering a single area in which ASHRAYA can be the

prime executor as opposed to being a funding agency for other NGOs. We intended to take up an area (educational focus and geographical location) that is scalable, repeatable and has a high impact on a large number of beneficiaries. The Government of Karnataka has 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). We intended 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 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 BEO (Block Education Officer) of Hanur Taluk. To date, we have completed four phases of Project Terra Firma and activities in Hanur Taluk; and are planning to start our fifth phase in the year 2014. Our current activities consist of libraries named **Arivina Aramane** (meaning a “Palace of Knowledge” in Kannada) at 6 higher primary schools (Kannur, Kempayyana Hatti, Ramapura, Basappana Doddi, Managalli, Hanur); and art programs, science clubs and nature clubs run using the libraries as the resource centers. **All our activities are active programs (and not just donated material) since we believe that sustainable impact needs a combination of materials, continuous activities, staffing and integration with school management.** ASHRAYA has spent close to \$29K over the last 6 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. We currently have 6 fulltime librarians and 2 part-time project coordinators paid for by ASHRAYA. To date, over 3,000 students have benefited from our projects. On Jan 3rd 2014, we celebrated the Library Day in which 600 best students from the 6 schools participated in competitions related to reading and writing. The table below shows the summary of accomplishments to date. You can find all details about Project Terra Firma along with status reports of the four phases, collateral, activity trackers, project monitors and training materials used by our staff at <http://www.ashraya-usa.org/latest-ashraya-initiative-projects-terra-firma/>. You can see photos from our various project activities at <http://www.ashraya-usa.org/photo-gallery/>.

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
Phase IV	2013	Stabilize and Operate 6 Libraries	4,027
		Start and execute Art Program in 6 Schools	2,300
		Conduct Mobile Library Day and Library Day	500
Total Project Expenditure to Date			28,562

3. Project Components

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

1. **Create Model Schools:** 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. **Improve Handwriting and Creativity Skills** 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. **Run Fun Educational Projects:** 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. **Set Up and Run Libraries:** 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 ethnic art (Worli and Pithora) painted by local artisans. Each library is equipped with 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.

4. 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. Incorporated and registered Ashraya as a non-profit organization in India so that we could staff and hire full time employees in India to run our projects; as well as raise funds locally
2. Created a library training manual and trained all 6 librarians on activity based learning
3. Successfully executed all activities in our activity based learning program through 2 rounds
4. 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
5. Conducted 3 rounds of GROWBY tests for 3000 children in schools to track progress of reading abilities
6. Started creating monitor dashboards on a monthly basis which we present to head masters, teachers and the Hanur Taluk BEO
7. Ran a “Take the Mobile Library to the Schools” day on Dec 27th, 2013 in which we took a mini library to 3 schools that we have identified for expansion in 2014; and conducted library activities to demonstrate our program.
8. Successfully conducted a Library Day on Jan 3 2014 in which the best exhibits from the various activity based programs were displayed and prizes distributed for the best exhibits. The Library Day was conducted from 8 AM to 4 PM and was attended by 700+ students culminating in an awards ceremony chaired by the DDPI Chamarajanagar District and BEO Hanur Taluk.

5. Plan for 2014 and Estimated Expenditure

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

1. Establish libraries in 3 more model schools that we will select in collaboration with Hanur Taluk 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. Hire a part time project coordinator to monitor ongoing activities and grow the initiative over time

Please see below the overview of expected expenditure for 2014 by project.

Project Name	Per School		No. of Schools	Across All Schools	
	Rs	\$		Rs	\$
1) Establish New Libraries & Operate Them for One Year	81,600	1,254	3	244,800	4,080
2) Operate Currently Operational Libraries Per Year	34,600	671	6	2207,600	3,460
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)	28,833	706	6	173,000	2,883
5) Cross Project Expenditure				105,800	1,763
Total Funding Sought Across All Projects				869,200	14,487

6. Impact Summary

1. An average of 500 students per school across all standards (1 to 8) will use the library and participate in the activities
2. 20 top students per school selected for the science club will learn how to conduct science experiments, complement science education and build scientific temper
3. 20 students per school participating in fun projects will learn how to work in teams, conduct projects (learn through fun) and build a health competitive spirit
4. 20 artistically inclined students per school selected for the art program will learn how to paint landscapes, portraits and caricatures; thus promoting creativity.

7. Summary

This is a document providing an overview and current status of **Project Terra Firma**, a complementary education program executed by ASHRAYA since 2008 in Rural Higher Primary Schools in Hanur Taluk, Karnataka. This project is executed directly by ASHRAYA through its local staff in collaboration with the Department Director of Primary Education (DDPI), Chamarajanagar District, Karnataka. Please contact Vasuki Subbarao (+1 404 457 1073 or 908 522 4580) for further details on this document.