



"Non-profit organization providing assistance on education, vocational training and income generation to rural and physically challenged children and youth in India since 1991

Ashraya Project Terra Firma Galileo's Muse - Distance learning in the times of COVID

Introduction to ASHRAYA: ASHRAYA is a 25 year old US-based NGO providing assistance to rural and physically challenged students in India in education, vocational training and income generation. We have 501(c)3 status from IRS (tax ID 52-1791311) and are a registered trust in India with 12A and 80G Certificates (BKIV 779 /13.14). We are also registered on Guidestar with a gold standard. We have disbursed funds worth \$400K to date to 30+ organizations all over India. You can follow these links to our website for overview information on ASHRAYA: <http://www.ashraya-usa.org/ashraya-overview/>

Project Terra Firma: ASHRAYA has been running **Project Terra Firma** comprising of complementary-skill based experiential programs in rural higher primary schools in Karnataka, India since 2008, with a current footprint of 10 full-fledged programs at 9 higher primary schools. We have shown great success in the execution of these programs and in imparting valuable life skills to students that will differentiate them in their years ahead. We have expanded, stabilized and refined program content, systems and processes and earned the trust of the people we work with (block education officers, school teachers and admin staff, students and their parents as well as the communities at large) to a point where the "Arivina Aramane" name (the Kannada title we have given to our initiative) has become well known in the project area we operate in. Project Terra Firma currently consists of libraries in 10 higher primary schools (Kannur, Kempayyana Hatti, Ramapura, Cowdalli, Managalli, Hanur, Ajjipura, Shagya, Halagapura and Lokkanahalli); along with **art programs, science clubs, book of the month and drama clubs, story writing programs, computer clubs, MLL activity-based learning programs, GROWBY learning level mentoring programs and all-rounder programs** (for students who participate in all other programs, to showcase their broad skillsets). ASHRAYA has spent ~\$250K to date on this initiative and our **current running annual operating budget is \$22K**. We have invested in a stable, reliable and passionate staff (**total staff of 17 members**) that is responsible for the establishment and operations of our programs. We have 10 fulltime librarians; a science teacher who runs the science club; an art teacher who runs our art program; a Kannada teacher who run our book of the month club and GROWBY mentoring program; a drama teacher, a project coordinator, a project advisor/lead and an independent 3rd party auditor. We collect all the work done by students in our programs as tangible proofs that are displayed in our libraries and audited by our auditor on a monthly basis. Over **3,000 students** benefit from our initiative every year, with ~1400 students participating in our various programs and the remaining 1600 students just using our libraries. We culminate every year with our annual day (**Leonardo Da Vinci Day**) in which 600 best students from the 9 schools participate in competitions related to our programs. We follow this with final practical exams leading to program certification. All videos related to our program activities and main events can be found at our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCp-yoRI1L57sfwqjUg3LQJA>

Case for Distance Learning: Our programs run during the school year (June to April) with dedicated periods (one hour period per program per school per week). However, due to COVID in India, schools have not opened on the schedule date (May 28th 2020) for the 2020-21 school year. And the Government of Karnataka has not issued a definitive date on which they will actually be reopened (current tentative date is Sept 15th 2020). We would like to however try to continue our programs using distance learning techniques that are applicable to the rural context we operate in. We are terming this initiative **Galileo's Muse** in honor of the famous scientist who used telescopes to study the stars. Our goals for this initiative are four-fold:

1. It should be inclusive and not exclude students who do not have access to the technologies needed to participate
2. It should facilitate smooth interaction between the teachers and students with minimal clutter
3. It should allow the work produced by the students to be collected, graded and audited using online mechanisms
4. It should reach at least 20% of the students who participated in our programs last year (20% x 1400 = 280 students)

Modus Operandi for Galileo's Muse: We plan to launch this initiative in the following 3 key phases:

1. **Pre-July 1st 2020:**
 - a. Our staff is currently collecting data on how many students belonging to a given school have cell phones (these phones would mostly be owned by the students' parents), what % of them are smart phones (vis-à-vis regular keypad operated phones), are the students willing to participate in online sessions, and when are the parents at home for students to be able to use these phones to participate in distance learning sessions. Our initial surveys indicate that ~50% of parents have regular phones, 20% have smart phones and 20% have no phones.
 - b. We are finalizing and prioritizing the programs that are suitable for distance learning: MLL activity-based program, book of the month club, story writing program, art program and select parts of the science program (project-based only) are suited for distance learning, while computer clubs and drama clubs might not be.
 - c. We are converting all our content into online versions that can be shared with students through WhatsApp
 - d. We are dividing students into groups for each program (given the power of distance learning, we could even mix students up across schools to promote cross-learning) and creating separate WhatsApp groups for each program-session intersect. These WhatsApp groups will be used to disseminate content to the students, send communications and receive work proofs.

- e. We will onboard all students to the right WhatsApp groups (program-session intersects). Please note that only students with smart phones can participate in our distance learning sessions. We will probably limit each program-session intersect to ~20 students (like we have in our current programs) so as to avoid clutter.
2. **July 1st 2020:** We plan to leverage the Zoom platform to start conducting our online sessions, limited in Phase 2 to only to students whose parents already have smart phones and who are willing to participate in our online sessions:
 - a. The teacher will pre-announce the timings for the sessions to be conducted each week
 - b. The teacher will distribute the e-content to the students ahead of the sessions (e.g. e-books, quizzes and discussion topics for the book of the month club) through the WhatsApp groups
 - c. The students will download the e-content and prepare for the sessions
 - d. The teacher will send the WhatsApp group a link to the Zoom online sessions ahead of the meetings
 - e. The teacher will start the sessions at the scheduled time
 - f. The students will click on the Zoom link in the WhatsApp group and join the sessions (there will be no need for the students to register into Zoom ahead of the sessions – this avoids friction)
 - g. The teacher will conduct the sessions with their video turned on. The students’ videos will be turned off but the teacher will selectively turn on student videos as needed during the sessions (e.g. when two students participate in a debate). Each session will last for 40 minutes to avoid payments to Zoom and keep our costs down.
 - h. The students will do any post-session work at their homes, take photos of their work with their smart phones and post these photos to the WhatsApp group.
 - i. The teacher will evaluate the work, grade them and post the grades back to the WhatsApp group. And the auditor will also audit the work posted by the students in these WhatsApp groups.
3. **Aug 1st 2020:** Between now and Aug 1st 2020, we would like to crowdsource old and unlocked smart phones that people have and deliver them to students whose parents currently possess regular phones. Our goal is collect and distribute ~200 phones in the next 45 days. We might have to pay the parents for the additional data plans the students might need to participate in the online sessions (see expected costs in the section below). These phones will remain as property of ASHRAYA, and we will expect the students to return the smart phones to us when students start coming back to school.

Need your help: We seek your help in launching **Galileo’s Muse** in the following two ways:

1. If you have old and outdated smart phones that are lying in your closet and are not slated for future use by anyone in your extended family, we would like you to send your phones to us by mail. Please make sure that the phones are unlocked before you send them; and also make sure to send the charger along with the phone. The address to send the phones to in US is **Vasuki Subbarao, 2418, 130th Place NE, Bellevue, WA 98005**. The address to send the phones to in India is **S. Hiriyanra, 518, LakshmiShankar, 13th Cross, 7th Main, ISRO Layout, BENGALURU, KARNATAKA 560078**. We will send you receipts of donation on the ASHRAYA letterhead as soon as we receive your phones. Our goal is to collect ~200 phones in the coming 45 days.
2. We will have to pay for the incremental data plans to cover the bandwidth consumed by students during the online session. We expect these 90 day plans to cost ~Rs. 300. Assuming that we will have ~200 students participating in our online programs, we expect the total cost to be ~\$1,000 for every three months of running this initiative. We would love for you to partially contribute towards these costs. You can write out a paper check in name of **ASHRAYA** and mail it to us at **2418, 130th Place NE, Bellevue, WA 98005** in US; or to **D601, Jacaranda Block, Brigade Millennium, JP Nagar 7th Phase, Bangalore 560078** in India.

Our Social Covenant: As a funder of **Galileo’s Muse**, we will email you quarterly project status reports. You can find videos of our activities on our YouTube channel (see link above) that we update every month. If you need to know more about our programs, please contact us at **404-457-1073 (Vasuki) or 404-457-5455 (Jayanthi) or** send us an email at vasuki.subbarao@gmail.com.

We look forward to working with you in making **Galileo’s Muse** a success in the coming months and thank you in advance for your support in these trying times.

Regards and Cheers,

Vasuki & Jayanthi, President and Treasurer, ASHRAYA

