



Suchana is a community group working in rural West Bengal, focusing on education and health. The education project (the Early Learning Group) is a group of children and teachers which meets three times a week to participate in an activity-based learning curriculum aiming to support and encourage those children who attend regular school, and provide an introduction to literacy to those who don't. Currently, 150 children participate.

Our health project in the six Suchana villages explores primary health in participatory ways and links villagers in with locally existing health services.

If you would like more information, please contact us at milward.bose@gmail.com



Newsletter Issue 7, May 2008

NEWS ON PROGRESS

We are very happy to announce that in early December, Suchana finally bought a 1/3 acre plot in an excellent location between the villages! Since then we have spent long hours discussing what we want to do in the building we hope to make, and designing the building accordingly. Last week, work on the foundations for the first stage of the building actually began - in an effort to get this part completed before the imminent monsoon.

We plan to make one large room surrounded on three sides by covered verandahs which will act as teaching spaces. The room will be divided into three spaces with movable partitions, home to the library, a small office, and art material storage and display. For large gatherings, the partitions will be moved back. Eventually, this room will have a second floor - for a 'quiet' reading room, and a small guest room. We also plan to have a modest kitchen for preparing tiffin. The Health Clinic will be a separate one-room building with covered verandahs and latrines attached.

We will be working on this building in stages, as and when we can raise funds. Which means we still need your help in achieving this very real goal! Our immediate target is to get the main room up during Autumn and Winter, so that we can start to run our planned programmes for pre-school and high-school children at the beginning of the 2009-10 session. We look forward to hearing from if you have fundraising ideas - any kind of assistance could be useful.



Watching our annual awards ceremony

EVENTS UPDATE

We have just completed a school year here, and started a new one, so we have been busy planning our new timetable and arranging an increase in numbers at the ELG by about 12. In April we held our awards ceremony and parents' meeting, which gave recognition to the teachers and the many children who have worked so hard to make this a productive and exciting year - in a wide variety of ways.

After our evaluation process in November, we took the new step at the end of December of cancelling our subject-based timetable and clearing two months for the development of dance, songs, short plays and gymnastics for our **Annual Show** in February. Not only the show, but also the process of preparing for it, was a great success. The children were impressively engaged in and committed to their many activities, and were proud to present a programme which included Santal, Kora, Bengali, Hindi and - perhaps uniquely in these circumstances - English country dances, as well as 5 short plays and a chorus of songs in 4 languages. The show was watched by around 500 people, and the highlight was perhaps the spectacular gymnastics display in which a group of children presented their relatively new-found talents in acrobatics and team co-ordination. One young parent said to me, 'I wish we had had a chance to do these things when we were small. We never did'.

In preparation for the show, the children also produced some fine art and craft work. One group learned to make clay flutes, with the help of **Uwe**



The foundations for the new Suchana!

Neumann; another group, under the guidance of our Thai friend **Nok**, learned a method of firing terracotta using only a few bricks and rice husk which is cheap and simple enough for the older children to carry out on their own. A third group, in conjunction with **Antaranga School**, took part in a paper collage workshop, which was followed by an exhibition of this and other children's artwork in Santiniketan. Finally, a group of older children took part in a research workshop on children's responses to the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore, on the initiative of **Soumik Nandi Majumdar**, art historian at Vishwa Bharati University.

In January, we held our annual sports day again, and made it a really cheerful event. Like last year, we combined individual races with team games, and found that the series of innovative events spread out the 'prizes' even further than before.

After the annual show, in early March, everyone involved in Suchana, including all the children, joined together for our yearly educational trip and picnic. This year we were given a tour of the ceramic process at the Confetti Pottery, Daranda – which was a real eye opener for many of us. We had our picnic, as well as games and relaxation, in the shade of an orchard nearby.

Everyone was very happy to see **Natalie Clarke** again when she visited for a few days in April, and taught some classes with her customary panache.

Suchana continues to support the Bengali dance lessons at the Kamalakantapur school, and pay for a gardener to help look after the vegetables the school grows to supplement the Midday Meal Programme.

Suchana ELG is now on holiday for the month of June, taking a break from the heat – but work on the foundations of the new building continues!

Chandni Mahato

Tragically, one of the Suchana ELG students, Chandni Mahato, drowned on May 13th along with her 5 year old nephew. They had been taking their regular morning bath in the river. Chandni had been a student of Suchana for all of Suchana's four years, and was growing in skills and confidence. We miss her.



Thank yous...

As ever, we have many people to thank. Without your support and encouragement this programme simply would not exist:

- To **St Stephen's School**, Canterbury, for sending warm clothes during the winter; to Class 9 at **Walthamstow Academy** for continuing to fundraise on Suchana's behalf; to **André Thilbault** for a very generous donation of money he inherited but felt he did not need; to **Siobhan Mehaffy, Tad McNulty, Jill Edbrooke, Evelyn McDaniel** and **Etsuko Yamaguchi/Chautary** for individual donations.
- Thank you also to those who made sustained efforts selling Christmas cards and other items for Suchana: **Maura Hurley, Keya Sarkar, 'Babylove'** in Canterbury, **'Kolkata'** in Brighton; and the people at **Faversham Fair Trade** who have shown solid support.
- A big thank you also to **Johnny Neale**, our first official volunteer, who spent a month of his gap year teaching English conversation to the Suchana teachers, and general English to the older students. Johnny adapted quickly and easily to our programme and made an enthusiastic and very well received contribution. In April, **Leticia Olivares** and **Annika Sundberg** also found us and joined us for a month, helping out very competently with English teaching.
- The Suchana teachers have progressively taken on more fundraising initiatives: a team went to the International School in Kolkata in December to take part in their Christmas Fair; and they operated a smooth rota system to sell cards at the Santiniketan **Pous Mela** – thanks to **Krishli**, a Santal organisation who shared their stall space with Suchana.
- And finally, thank you to the Trustee Group, who continue to work on establishing **Friends of Suchana** as a support organisation in the UK, and whose legwork and patience is greatly appreciated.

Health Work

Suchana's health work is progressing steadily. We held another eye camp in early January, which was followed up with refraction testing in April as well as negotiations on further cataract and pterygium operations. The health team have been working to support a patient who was hospitalised with liver problems that were eventually diagnosed as established TB. The team linked him up to the government TB treatment system. They have also supported an ELG student who has long-term kidney problems and needs regular dialysis. The team continues their twice weekly village visits and regular basic treatment.



Suchana: The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

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