



The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

Supporting a rural community: creative solutions
to education and health



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

suchana.india@gmail.com

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The Education Resource Centre



The Education Resource Centre building, May 2009

Watching this building come up is not just exciting, it's incredible!

It is the result of a combined effort by so many people – Suchana's teachers, Committee, builders, helpers, advisers, fundraisers, friends, family, and all those of you who have helped us with donations. It's also inspiring – this is the space where we are finally going to be able to pull together all the potential gathered over the last 4 years and put it into a structured but flexible full-time programme. That is a big responsibility – but there's a lot of anticipation and enthusiasm here about taking this responsibility on.

The veranda roof, which many of you have specifically helped us build, is due to be completed by next week. If all goes well, we will be 'moving in' during the June holiday and from July Suchana will be in operation from the new site! Through July and August we will run our current ELG and Health programmes, and in September we will begin the new elements of the full-time programme in phases – 'tuitions' for middle school children; extra pre-school mornings; computer training; full-time library and supervised space for reading, completing homework assignments or working on art projects. By December, we hope to start working on extending the library facilities to new members from other villages.

Construction is never completely plain sailing though. Having gathered together the paper work to make an application for an electricity connection (funded by a great combined effort by the Calcutta100 Club and Mustard Seeds) – we discovered that we couldn't submit the local building tax required for the application until after the General Election. The election has been phased and has just finished – so if we're lucky we can now make the application and will have electricity ready for our July start.

EVENTS UPDATE

Although it may be true that the building has been dominating Suchana's life, we have also been running our busy winter schedule, designing the **new 2009 greetings cards**, organising new admissions for the 2009-10 session and planning the details of the new programme.

We were especially pleased to publish – and release at the December guardian's meeting – our small **book of children's creative writing** and illustrations called *Kokiler Bashir Sur* ('The Song of the Kokil Bird's Flute'). This initiative, following the introduction of creative writing class sessions last year, was intended to emphasise the value of the children's original ideas and their ability to express them. Each family was presented with a copy of the book, and the remaining books are for sale locally.

Sports Day in January was a great success with its mixture of individual and team events and plenty of activity for mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts and brothers and sisters too. This event was closely followed in February by the **Annual Show**, as vibrant as ever, which presented Santal, Kora and Bengali dance as well as an English-origin Maypole dance; short dramas in Kora, Bengali and English; songs in all languages and a truly inspiring gymnastics performance. Please ask for the 1hr 45 minute DVD of the show if you'd like it.



Photo: Pepe Zalba

Although we were a little sad to forego our annual picnic this year to save money for the building, this decision was a credit to everyone's commitment to getting the building up – and there's always next year for a picnic!

THE LIBRARY

The ELG library is really flourishing, and we would be very grateful for help in expanding this really effective literacy resource. We have the site – now we just need more books!

We especially need children's Bengali books (Ages 4-14). Simple English books are also useful (Ages 1-7).

The books we 'manage' are read by many, many children!

If you have books you could give us, please contact suchana.india@gmail.com. We can easily collect from Kolkata.

More Work on Equality

Suchana is always looking for new ways to work at building equal social relationships across the many groups which make up its membership. A rewarding framework for this work has been the annual show. All activity groups which prepare inputs for the show are mixed across communities. This year, while some children learning Kora dance, for instance, were Kora children, others were from the Santal and Hindu communities. Similarly, the Santal dance group included non-Santals, and also, as an innovation, included boys.

In our regular routine, 'assembly' offers an opportunity to learn songs in each of the four languages in use: Bangla, Santali, Kora and English. All children learn various songs in each language. For the show, four of these – one in each language – were selected and presented as chorus performances with all 150 children. This process ensures that the children have a minimal grasp of each others' first languages, as well as turning around the common situation in which only 'minority' language speakers are required to use the 'majority' language and not the reverse.

The drama groups are also sometimes used as opportunities to probe social inequality and other issues. This year, the Kora drama group presented a short play on the benefits of forming literacy support systems for small children within the village. The English drama examined gender roles and identities in a light-hearted way; some boys played girls' parts and the central girl character in the drama imagined a situation in which the restrictions placed on her were placed on her brother instead.



Santal Dance

Photo: Pepe Zalba

We very much hope that in our new, full time programme we will be able to explore many more ways to gently challenge the boundaries demarcating social hierarchies and work towards giving each child an equal chance.

Suchana now has a **BROCHURE** summarising our work. Please ask if you'd like to see it - we'd love to hear from you.

Thank yous...

This is what we mean by Suchana being an organisation involving the good will of so many – we have many people to thank. Many of you are aware that Suchana is at the moment climbing it's steepest hill financially in building a space from which to work – and so many have responded with generosity. Beyond this, there are also many who have helped us with cheerful visits and encouraging words – we can't do without these either.

A big thank you to our **visiting volunteers** who have made thoughtful and committed contributions: **Susie Travis** and **Alex Brown** who spent a month here in November; **Malilee Elis** who joined us for February and March; and **Iolo Cheung** who played some fine cricket as well as teaching English in March/April. Thanks also to **Alex** and **Mylune** and to **Maura Hurley** who all ran art workshops to help prepare our new greeting cards designs.

Mustard Seeds in Kolkata raised money for Suchana's electricity connection and the veranda roof. Thank you very much to members of the **Calcutta 100 Club** who responded generously: Kate Goldman, Jan Fujikawa, Rajita Majumdar and Family, Chris Rickerd, Rick Pestana, Jean Sullivan, Mary Clock-Rust, Jen Blain and Family, Sagaree Sengupta and Family, Kyoko Hosoki, One World English School and the Nara Team, Nancy Anchor, Marguerite Shaddy, Lenore Long Morimoto, Ann Overton, Stephan Mackerras, Atula Ahuja, Susie McNaughton and Neil Haran.

Many other **friends** who responded to our appeal for help in completing the veranda roof before the monsoon (which we did!) include: Rangan Chakravarti; Arun Elassery and Kanti Ratna; Rebecca Windsor; Sibaji Bandyopadhyay; Nandinee Bandyopadhyay and Amitrajit Saha; Debashish Bandyopadhyay (and thanks for the mobile phone); Manjuri and Somen Basu; Abeer Chakraborty; Moinak Biswas; Nisha Ruparel and Kunal Sen (and thanks for the great teaching materials); Arjun Gaurisaria; Usha Ramaswamy; Ruchira and Angshu Das; Sumit Ghosh; Pradip Kumar Datta; Manav Jalan; Vikram Patnaik; Janaki Nair; Indira Chowdhury. Big thanks to everyone!

And for donations to **Friends of Suchana** for the building and the programme, many thanks to: Michael and Petrina Slaytor; Queen Elizabeth's School, Faversham; Avril Waters; The Revd Nick Stacey and Anne; Mary Gray; Jose Irazuzta; Chandra Ghosh and Norman Heindson; Robert Anderson and Lindsey; Bunt Ghosh; the late Aase Richmond; Rajit Ghosh; Marjorie Bird; Helen Reid; Daphne Vivian-Neale; Ben and Anne Wright; Susan Mew; Dave Yeo; Daphne Winter; and Ella and Keaghan Wright who saved up their pocket money. In addition, many kind people who have given regularly are not forgotten.

For their valuable work selling Suchana's **Christmas cards**, we'd like to thank Rajit Ghosh, Johnny Neale, Julie Neale, Anna Binnie Dawson, Robert Anderson; Maxine Lock; Poppy Thompson; and Selene Murphy and Ilana May Pattinson and classmates – as well as those of you who have been selling cards for us for several years and help us with UK fundraising. Thanks also, of course, to those who bought cards. We have our new designs for 2009 at the printers right now!

Last but not least, thanks to Mrinal Sen for donating his used computer; to Jo and Kathy O'Connell for the lovely encyclopaedia and computer resources; and to Rajarshi, Ratanpalli for donating art materials.

If anyone else has a used, functioning PC (India) or laptop (elsewhere) – Suchana could really use it in our new programme.