

March 2016

Dear Friends,

India has just finished celebrating one of its biggest festivals of the year . . . Holi! Holi is the spring festival of color, celebrated by throwing either colored water or dry colored powders at each other. We played together at the school last Saturday, the last day of school before the week-long break for Holi and Easter. Colors flying everywhere!



आशा दीप विद्याश्रम

After a month of preparation, Asha Deep presented its annual Spring Extravaganza, our song, dance, drama, and circus show for the public. It went very well this year and was attended by over 1,000 spectators. Our show was once again enhanced by items choreographed by the Performers Without Borders (PWB) team. You can see a 5 minute video of their time in Varanasi at: <https://vimeo.com/158907340>. For the most part, in the video, our kids are the ones not in uniform. There are some great shots of fire acts from our Spring Extravaganza. One of the highlights of the show for me was when Anusha, one of our students who lost her hearing last year, stood in front of the crowd and introduced our drama. It must have been scary for her, but she did a fine job. I was also very proud of the dozen or so boys who happily stayed after the show was over to dismantle the stage and sweep the entire performance space. Here are a few photos taken that evening . . .



Girls performing classical Indian dance

Vijay the clown mesmerizing the crowd



Boys dancing to a song about hopes and dreams



part of our fire show finale

A few days after our performance, a group of seven women from Singapore came to visit our school. Similar to what they did during their last visit, the group came prepared to teach a variety of arts and crafts.

They also brought several educational posters for our classrooms. The kids loved their time with them! It is always such a treat when they visit.



We had fun!



It is with great pleasure that I now introduce our 2016 graduating class! I feel very proud of this group of ten youngsters. They have been studying so hard this year and are well-prepared to transfer to a local high school in just a couple weeks. I have attached a file which tells you a bit more about each student. (It will print to a tri-fold brochure.) Most of them want to become either doctors or engineers. As you know, their families are unable to afford typical high school fees. If we want to help these students continue their studies, we will need your help. Luckily, we discovered a new school last year that is providing a good standard of education at a lower cost than the school to which we had sent our previous graduates. We will now be able to sponsor one student at a cost of just \$24

per month. This amount will cover all school fees, plus books, notebooks, and tuition costs. If you can help with this, please let me know. We have sponsors for four students; we need to find six more!



2016 Asha Deep 8th graders

Finally, I want to share the joy of our first class to complete high school. In 2012, our first batch graduated from Asha Deep and transferred to a local high school. We expect all nine of that original class to graduate this year. They have been taking their national board exams during the month of March and have just two exams left. Considering that these are the children of uneducated parents, this is a very big accomplishment! One of them still has aspirations to be a chef. One plans to become a photographer. Four plan to continue to university to

obtain bachelor's degrees in Commerce. One will study fine arts in university. One boy plans to become a scientist (also university bound), and one girl will give an exam to enter medical college in May. (She continues to work toward becoming a doctor.)

All in all, we are enjoying an exciting and happy time right now. We just have five more weeks of scramble and study before final exams and the start of summer vacation. We've almost made through another year of creating hope for some of the underprivileged children in Varanasi.

Wishing you all a wonderful Spring,

love,
Connie



Our first class to graduate from 12th grade!